Weird Tales

JULY 1932

The Unique Magazine

25 CENTS

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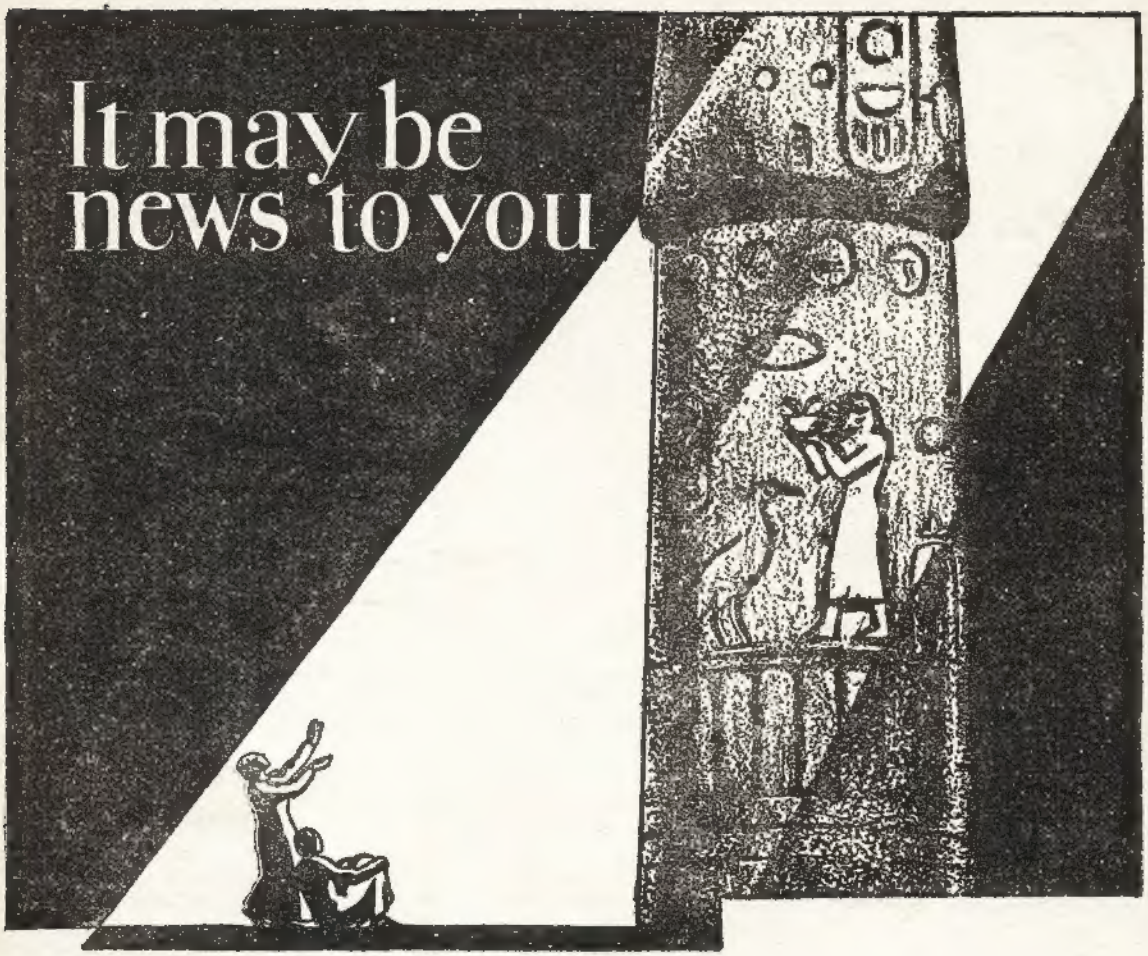

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W. T.—1

Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME 20 NUMBER 1

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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A WIDE diversity of opinion among you, the readers, as to whether we should continue to print serials in our Weird Story Reprint department, is shown in the letters that have poured in to the Eyrie in response to our question as to whether we should offer *Dracula* and other weird novels to you after *Frankenstein* is completed. We shall *not* offer *Dracula* in this magazine, as a large proportion of our readers have already read Bram Stoker's famous vampire novel, as evidenced from your letters; but the question is still open as to whether we shall reprint other weird novels that are less widely known. We shall follow your wishes in this matter.

N. J. O'Neail, of Toronto, Canada, writes to the Eyrie: "May I register a vote against serial reprints? I have no complaints as to the quality of your reprints; my point is that probably all your readers have already read *Dracula, Frankenstein* and Sax Rohmer's *Brood of the Witch Queen*—the latter, to my mind, one of the most gripping stories ever written. Those who have not read these stories can obtain them from almost any library. My plea is that at least fifty per cent if not one hundred per cent of the reprints should be from the back files of your own magazine—a storehouse of epic fiction, the bulk of which is not available from any other source. I should like to see everything of Lovecraft's and Quinn's republished; also *The Werewolf of Ponkert* and innumerable others. Why not publish a list of early stories, and let the readers vote on the order in which they should be reprinted? I should willingly vote for Merritt's *Woman of the Wood* and Arnold's *Night Wire,* even though I have read them and still have in my possession the issues in which they appear. As the best stories in the May issue I would pick *The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis, The Last Magician,* and *The Broken Thread. The Earth-Brain* in the April number was one of Edmond Hamilton's best. It carries a great deal farther a theme on which Conan Doyle touched in one of his last stories, *When the Earth Screamed.*"

"For originality, variety and cleverness, WEIRD TALES is supreme in its field," writes Harold Huffaker, of Visalia, California. "Each issue is as full of surprizes as a grab bag. The only thing we can be sure of is the fine quality of the stories it will contain, and the general excellence of the magazine as a whole. Your plan to include *Frankenstein, Dracula* and other weird serials in your reprint department is commendable. I also like the idea of reprinting some of the best of the short stories that appeared in earlier issues of W. T. These could be sandwiched in between the serials and would add to the general interest of your magazine. Your wish to let

(Please turn to page 6)

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(Continued from page 4)

your readers decide what your future policy shall be in regard to reprints, plainly shows your sincere desire to give them the very best that is in your power to give."

A letter from Miriam Allen Weeks, of Boise, Idaho, says: "I have often read and liked WEIRD TALES. Your magazine really lives up to its title, as the stories are indeed weird and unusual. I like the fantastic bits of poetry printed in the magazine too."

"Every issue of your most fascinating magazine is eagerly read by me," writes Helen Sontag, of Norwood, Ohio. "I can hardly wait until the next issue appears. Kirk Mashburn is my favorite writer. He simply is perfect. I am very pleased with the magazine and very seldom find a story I do not enjoy."

J. C. Koekler, of Annandale, Minnesota, writes to the Eyrie: "I just finished reading the May WEIRD TALES and my vote goes without hesitation to *The Brotherhood of Blood* by Hugh B. Cave. The story was the finest vampire tale I have come across since *Dracula*. For several years now I have bought your magazine regularly, and I enjoy it more than any other publication on the stands."

A letter from Harold Dunbar, of Chatham, Massachusetts, says: "This is my first visit to the Eyrie, and might never have occurred except for the super-excellence of your May issue. *The Brotherhood of Blood* by Hugh B. Cave is the most grippingly human story you have printed in many a month. Every word of it is real and vivid. I have read it three times, and each time found something new and subtle. Second place goes to *The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis* by Clark Ashton Smith, which, though criminally padded with amateurish introspection and handicapped by a severe case of adjectivitis, was truly horrible, cruel, shuddery, original. *The Horror From the Mound* was the single poor effort in the issue, containing as it did no less than four flagrant breaches of accepted vampire tradition. Are we to believe, simply because Mr. Howard so informs us, that vampires can now remain alive for years, underground, without their customary nightly feast of human blood? Or that they can be confined to their graves by a mere slab of rock? Or that they now find it necessary to engage in rough-house wrestling bouts with their prospective victims? Improvements are always in order, but Mr. Howard's new type of vampire is certainly no improvement!"

August W. Derleth, himself an author of note, writes to the editor: "I like *The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis* in the May issue, with *The Last Magician* pressing close up to it for first honors. Doctor Keller did a fine piece of work, despite some careless writing. He creates a great atmosphere, and his story gave me a lot of genuine pleasure. Can you persuade him to give us more stories of the Brotherhood—let us have one about those in Gobi now? Howard's *Horror From the Mound* was also first rate, though I didn't care too much for the fight between the vampire and the narrator; nevertheless Howard did a good job on it and made me swallow it and like it."

Guy Detrick, of Big Prairie, Ohio, writes to the Eyrie: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES since 1925, because I was attracted by one of Quinn's stories. I have continued to be attracted, since. I have one suggestion to make. It is a fact, with regard to these weird story reprints, that if they were submitted in an editorial office today

(Please turn to page 139)

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The Phantom Hand

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

An astounding novel of Black Magic, eery murders, and weird occult happenings

DON WENTWORTH had no remembrance of what preceded the strange state in which he found himself. He knew that, unless he came quickly back to consciousness, he would be a dead man; for something like a rope was about his throat, tightening inexorably and choking out his life. And he was clawing impotently at it, and vainly seeking to free himself.

If he could get his fingers upon it before his throat quite closed, he could tear it away, he knew, for it was soft—and the more deadly because of that. But his arms and hands seemed paralyzed, and the same creeping paralysis was in his brain. He couldn't think, couldn't remember; he didn't know where he was, or who he was.

The vision of Lorna West flashed through his mind. He didn't think of her by name, only as some one infinitely dear and precious to him, for whose sake he had to live, to kill this thing. He put forth every effort. But what was happening to him? Shadows all about him were taking form, springing into horrible reality.

God! he was standing on a scaffold, and those were figures of men, seen in blurred silhouette through the material of the cap or mask that covered his face! He was in the act—infinitely prolonged—of dropping through a trap-door. The noose was tightening, and at the end of the fraction of a second he would be dead, killed by the dislocation of the vertebræ as his body checked the fall!

A moment infinitely prolonged, for the fall seemed to have begun centuries before, and it was still going on. Time had become suspended, in order that he might taste that moment of bitter retribution to the utmost. But what was his crime? Murder? Whom had he killed, and when, and why?

He could see in a dim way, as if he had somehow become exteriorized to his body. He could see the drab jail yard, with the shaft of pale sunshine that gilded one wall, the high steps of the gallows, and the little knot of spectators—the prison governor or sheriff, whichever he might be, the doctor, stethoscope already in hand, and the brutal face of the hangman at his side.

Then the open door of the trap and his body plunging downward, but so slowly! Like the movements in a slowed-up film. And then of a sudden the realization came home to Don that that human form, the features twisted in anticipatory agony, was not his own!

Not his own! It was another who was suffering, a portly, elderly man, with graying hair and white mustache, a face that he had seen somewhere and forgotten.

Then, of an instant, a shadow seemed to hover in air beside the victim. A youngish man with a dark but pleasing face—an Arab or Persian, for he wore a turban about his head. Don knew that he was invisible to the little group assembled in the jail yard. In his hand was a knife, and he was slashing at the rope.

But the knife made no impression, and

"The knife made no impression, and from the Arab's lips there came the wailing cry, 'Too late!'"

from the dark man's lips there broke the wailing cry, "Too late!"

Then of a sudden came the end. Don sensed it with relief, though it meant physical extinction. The awful jerk as the body tautened against the rope, the shock of riven bone and rending tissue. The cloud of black unconsciousness that fogged the brain even before the pain could reach it.

Don felt himself plunging downward. Then, somehow, he had forced himself free of the dream. He was himself again, and the dream had no more substance. He was on his feet in his stateroom aboard the *President Harrison,* gasping, his forehead bathed with sweat, his hand fumbling desperately for the electric light button.

He snapped it on at last, and found himself in his pajamas and bare feet, with the berth disordered, and the bedclothes lying in a heap upon the floor. With that, the disorder of the nightmare began to give place to recollection. He knew who he was now, and where he was.

In the mirror a white face was staring into his. For an instant Don hardly recognized it as his own reflection. The terror of death was still in those protruding eyes—bulging as if in very truth the rope had been about his neck. And now, to Don's horror, he saw that on either side of the throat there was a faint but unmistakable livid bruise!

He glanced about the stateroom, looked under the bed; no one was hiding there. It certainly could have been nothing but a nightmare, yet he had neither eaten nor drunk anything that ought to have disagreed with him. The very force of his imagination must have imprinted those livid marks upon his throat.

The light was dissipating Don's fears, though that horrid memory was still very real to him. He glanced at the clock upon the shelf, and saw that it was seven o'clock. The dawn was already stealing through the porthole.

Merciful heavens, there was the face again, the face of the man who had been hanged! There, in the center of the porthole, looking in at him, the eyes closed in death, the skin livid! Don leaped forward, and in a new access of fear drove his fist hard against the glass.

The face vanished. Blood oozed from Don's broken knuckles. He stood there, glaring wildly out at the gray, heaving sea. He knew the face now. It was that of State Senator West, Lorna's father, whom he had seen twice in his life, more than a year before.

State Senator West, a power in the beautiful city on the Gulf of Mexico! Not a good power. A self-made man, a politician of a certain school. Don had often wondered how Lorna could be his daughter. But a power nevertheless, and a leader of the community. How could Senator West have paid the supreme penalty?

Preposterous! If he thought any more about it, he would go mad. That second vision must have been a mere prolongation of the nightmare. He had not been fully awake. Don had hardly tasted liquor for months, but now he opened his steamer trunk and drew out a bottle of whisky, nearly full. He placed it to his lips and took a deep draft. It ran through his veins like fire. He was feeling better now. God, what a dream!

But now Don could trace its genesis. It went back to Lorna's cryptic communication of a year before, and his anxiety throughout the voyage because she had failed to answer a single one of his urgent radiograms. He must have been subconsciously more worried than he had known.

Don put on his clothes and went up on deck. The fresh air was rapidly restoring him.

"Up early, Mr. Wentworth!" The night radio man was just coming off duty. In his hand he held a bunch of radio messages for posting on the bulletin board.

"Anything for me?" asked Don.

"No, I'm sorry. Don't seem to get any answer to those messages of yours. I'm sure everything will be all right, though. People change their address——"

"Yes, I guess they never reached her," answered Don. "Any important news come through?"

"No, nothing much here," replied the operator. He nodded and passed on, while Don stood at the rail, in mind spanning the long knots that still separated him from his destination, Cannonville, where Lorna lived.

It was a year since Don had received his last communication from Lorna West. A week before that there had been one of her usual bright, affectionate letters, telling him all the news. Her father was not going to run for office again. He was talking of retiring from poltics, and she was glad of it. She was looking for-

ward to the expiration of Don's two-years' contract with the mining company, and then—well, she hadn't changed!

A week later there came the cable dispatch, telling of trouble, begging him to return at once, but explaining nothing. It had been brought to him in a cleft stick by a native over a hundred miles of mountain passes, for the cinnabar mine, believed to be the richest in the world, was in the interior of the province of Chinese Yunnan.

Don had sent a reply, which had probably never reached its destination; for, while he was waiting a more detailed explanation, the little group of Americans were carried off for ransom by raiding brigands.

It was a year before the American embassy was able to get the ransom to their captors. That had been a terrible year for Don, imprisoned in the interior of China, with no possible way of getting news from Lorna.

During his captivity he had made three fruitless efforts to escape, only to be recaptured. Then unexpectedly he had been set free, and he had made his way to the coast and taken the first boat home.

He had wirelessed Lorna every day, and had received no answer to his messages. He had been growing frantic. Aboard the English ship, he had obtained no access to an American newspaper. For the first part of the voyage he had lived on hope, but now that hope had become shot through with despair.

Lorna's message had made an obscure reference to her father. Lemuel West was reputed to hold his state in the hollow of his hand, though it was said he was the tool of certain predatory interests who had made and could unmake him. He had never had any higher idea of politics than "to the victors the spoils." He had had for his associates such men as "Mike" Moroni, the bootleg king, Gus Walstein, Abner Wells, and the sinister millionaire, traction magnate and society *flaneur*, Godfrey Moore, who had contributed fifty thousand dollars to the new Bab temple that had been built in Cannonville.

(The Bab Temple! That, of course, had explained Don's dream of the Persian with the knife!)

Easy-going rather than vicious, a pleasant host, Don had found him easy to get along with. Lorna worshipped her father, and refused to listen to anything against him. Only to Don had she intimated that she was aware of his associations.

Eight bells, the call for early breakfast! Don ceased his pacing of the deck and turned to descend the stairway. The sun had just appeared on the horizon, turning the heaving sea to molten gold. The vision of the night was now definitely a thing of the past.

"She's moved to another address," he told himself, almost with conviction. "I'll be seeing her in eight days now—eight days if I take the fast overland——" And he fell to planning and calculating, forcing himself to the conviction that all was well with Lorna.

A few of the passengers were entering the saloon, stopping to look at the radio bulletins that had been posted outside the door. Don made his way into their midst, and his eyes took in a single item:

SENATOR LEMUEL WEST PAID THE SUPREME PENALTY BY THE ROPE AT MIDNIGHT FOR MURDER OF POLICE CAPTAIN MORSE.

And that was what the radio operator had called "nothing much!" Staggered, dumb, reading and re-reading the brief item in utter ignorance of what it had reference to, Don suddenly realized that midnight at Cannonville would have been just about seven in the morning on board the *President Harrison*—the hour at which he had seen that awful vision!

Don's first act on arriving at San Francisco was to go to a newspaper office and read the year-old newspapers that had reference to the affair. It appeared that a political scandal of the first magnitude had broken out in Cannonville.

The murdered police captain had got the goods on the gang that had been plundering the public treasury. They included State Senator West, Mike Moroni, Gus Walstein, Abner Wells, and the millionaire Godfrey Moore. These saw long terms of imprisonment confronting them, according to the press. Morse could not be squared.

At this juncture, Lemuel West had gone to a dinner at Godfrey Moore's magnificent country place outside Cannonville. According to the statement he made at his trial, he had been drugged and lost consciousness, coming to his senses in his own apartment, to find himself under the guard of detectives.

His hands and clothing were blood-stained, he had in his possession some of the murdered man's papers, his finger-prints had been found on Captain Morse's desk in his home. Moreover, concealed in West's apartment was a blood-stained shirt, wrapped around a gavel, a present to the senator from a fraternal organization, with which Morse's skull had been beaten in.

It was circumstantial evidence of the most damning character. The senator had been tried with the dispatch demanded by an aroused public opinion, but he had apparently succeeded in burning the evidence against his conferedates in crime in Morse's furnace. The jury had brought in a conviction after an absence of twenty minutes. The Court of Appeals had confirmed the verdict and sentence. So West was hanged!

There was not one word in reference to Lorna that Don could find. Don had wirelessed her every day, in spite of her silence; he had wired her from San Francisco, and there had been no answer. He took the overland train to Cannonville.

One rather singular item of news ran in Don's mind during the journey. It stated that Lemuel West had been attended during his last days by Sudh Hafiz, "pastor" of the Bab Temple, which it was stated, had a growing adherence among the fashionable in Cannonville. Two days and a night, and about noon Don got off the train at his destination. He took a taxi to the apartment house where Lorna and her father had lived. His heart was beating madly as he made his inquiries of the telephone-girl.

"No, sir, Miss West left here it must have been nearly a year ago, after the trouble began," she answered.

"Where did she go? Is she in the city? Have you any idea?"

The girl shook her head. "There's a stack of mail was held here for a month and then sent to the dead letter office. I saw in the papers that she was a good deal at the state penitentiary at Hornell. I guess you could get her address from the warden there—at least, he's the most likely person to know."

"Thanks," answered Don dully. He picked up his suitcase and prepared to resume his journey. Hornell was two hundred miles away, but a train ought to land him there that night.

As he pushed out through the entrance door, however, a hand fell on his shoulder. Don found himself looking into the face of a good-looking but dark-featured man. He gave a violent start. For it was the man whom he had seen in his vision, trying to cut the rope, except that the turban had been replaced by a smart hat of gray felt.

"I see we know each other, Mr. Wentworth," said the other, in perfect English. "Will you do me the honor of lunching with me at my house? I believe I have

information of value to impart to you, including the present whereabouts of Miss West. My name is Sudh Hafiz, and I am in charge of the Bab Temple here."

"You assure me positively that Lorna West is the guest of Godfrey Moore, that she is unharmed, and that she is free to depart at will?" asked Don.

"I assure you of all those things, upon my honor," replied the other. "Also, that you must on no account alarm her by your premature appearance; at least, not until we have talked certain matters over."

Don looked about him, at the pleasant, comfortably furnished room in the house adjoining the temple, of white stone, which stood on a fashionable residential street. The house, however, was so shaded by big trees and ornamental plants that, with its long lawn, it might have been in the heart of the country.

The meal had been simple, ample, and perfectly cooked, served by a Persian boy. In the large living-room, where Don sat smoking a cigar, there was an atmosphere of profound peace.

"Lemuel West was not guilty!" said Sudh Hafiz. "He was not a good man, rather a spiritually undeveloped one, but he was very far from being a murderer. He was the victim of a diabolical conspiracy on the part of men who wished to cover up their records, and they, in turn, were the tools of dark forces which only Godfrey Moore understands."

"He was the leader of the conspiracy, then?"

"He—and others of whom you have not heard. My friend, I know that you have already resolved to pursue all means to bring the conspirators to justice, for Miss West's sake. I assure you, no ordinary means will suffice. Did they not nearly kill you on board the *President Harrison?*"

Don was dumfounded. A normal, healthy-minded American, he would have derided the possibility of the Persian's having access to the contents of his own mind; he looked at him suspiciously, half believing that he was tricking him.

"Had they succeeded in substituting you for poor West," said Sudh Hafiz, "you would have been found dead in your bunk, of so-called apoplexy, and he would have died of heart failure, before he slipped into the trap."

"They? Who?" Don demanded.

"I shall come to that later. They had already marked you down as one who would be their inveterate enemy. For the Akashic Records, the books in which everything is writ, are open to the vision of the initiated a little way in front of the present; in other words, they can see for a short distance into the future.

"It was I who saved you, Mr. Wentworth, because I knew the part you were to play. And I have seen you every moment since that morning, and, I may say, protected you."

"You know," said Don, "I'm a hard-headed sort of fellow. I don't deny all—the sort of thing you're saying, but my life has been—well, different."

"An attitude I can thoroughly respect," said Sudh Hafiz. "But, since it is decreed that we are to work together, I shall ask only one thing of you, that you accept my statements, however incredible they may seem, as a working hypothesis, and let the events justify them."

"I'll take you up on that," answered Don. There was something convincing in the young Persian's sincerity, despite the preposterous nature of his beliefs. "Now, who are 'They'?"

Sudh Hafiz answered indirectly: "People have wondered why the Bab Temple was built in this city of the South, where public opinion is much less tolerant of strange faiths than in, let us say, New

York or Chicago. It was at the behest of the Master, the living embodiment of the Babist faith today, who directs all our activities from the monastery in my native land.

"He knew that in this region of your Southern states tremendous forces of evil were gathering for an assault upon humanity, utilizing such men as Godfrey Moore and Lemuel West—the former a conscious agent of the dark forces, the latter merely a tool.

"Therefore he sent me here, to promulgate the doctrines of universal brotherhood, and to fight for Ormuzd, the divine Right, against Ahriman, the devilish Evil. But I need hardly say that this purpose has not been revealed to the amiable society ladies who honor us by attending our temple services occasionally."

"Yet you reveal it to me?"

"You are appointed to help us. It is not the illuminated who are chosen."

"What is to be done? What are we working at? To clear West's name?"

"Incidentally that will be done. But Godfrey Moore is the arch-enemy. He learned the secrets of the Black Art in Paris in his youth. He applied them to make his power supreme in this state. He aims much higher. Do not be deceived in him."

"I must tell you, Mr. Hafiz——"

"Sudh Hafiz merely, to you," murmured the Persian.

"My first object is to see Lorna West. We are engaged to be married. I last heard from her a year ago——"

"Just before you were kidnapped by Chinese brigands," smiled the other. "That, too, was arranged. It was I who negotiated your release. But pray take that as one of the statements that have to be accepted only as a working hypothesis," he continued blandly. "She failed to answer your messages. Nevertheless, she received them all."

"Then——" cried Don, starting from his seat and flinging down the cigar into the ash-tray.

"You will find her changed when we call upon Godfrey Moore tonight."

"She no longer loves me?"

"You will find her changed," repeated Sudh Hafiz gravely. "Ask me no more now. But have faith that everything will be well in the end."

"We call upon Godfrey Moore?"

"We visit him on the most amiable terms. Remember, he contributed largely toward the construction of the temple. We have no illusions about each other. We do not need to beat about the bush. Also, he will understand your own position perfectly. Mr. Wentworth, when the time comes for battle, there will be no mercy shown."

"What is he trying to do?" asked Don incredulously.

"As an agent of the dark forces, he aims to bring about evil in place of good; concretely, to so debauch the minds of men that there will no longer be any resistance to his power. And just now he is using Lemuel West as his prime agent."

"A dead man?"

"A very live man, burning with hate and resentment against those who robbed him of his earthly existence, hardly aware that he has passed over. A wild bull in my china shop, who needs to be lassoed, Mr. Wentworth."

He stood up. "I'm afraid you think I have been talking the wildest nonsense," he said. "However, tonight we shall call upon Godfrey Moore, who, in fact, is expecting us, and you shall see Miss West. Have patience till then, and pray consider yourself my guest."

He touched a bell, and the Persian boy appeared. "Show Mr. Wentworth to the guest-room," he said in English.

Don followed him upstairs into a well-furnished bedroom, from whose windows

he could see the big temple next door. When he was alone he pulled himself together. The Persian's story had been ridiculous, of course—but any way he would see Lorna that evening.

DON spent the afternoon strolling in capacious grounds. He entered the temple and admired the interior, which was carved with arabesques, a great vaulted roof supported on columns of exquisite slenderness. Seats were set all around it, in many rows, and there appeared to be no altar—only a platform in the center, with a reading-desk or low pulpit.

Sudh Hafiz did not appear again until dinner time, when the two sat down together to another meal.

"You have spent an anxious afternoon, I'm afraid," said the Persian. "However, after your long wait, one afternoon is at least tolerable."

"If it hadn't been for you," said Don, "I'd have gone off on a wild-goose chase to Hornell. You told me that Godfrey Moore is expecting me. How did he know that I would be here?"

Sudh Hafiz merely smiled at the question, and did not answer it. Instead, he said:

"Tonight is to be, in a sense, a conference, a test, an armistice—call it what you will. We have reached the point where Godfrey Moore no longer underestimates the strength of our leader, who is actively directing the campaign against him. Probably Moore will attempt to frighten us by some magician's tricks, but he can not harm us. His power is only over those who have voluntarily subjected themselves to him. Each of us has much to learn from this meeting—but don't let yourself be perturbed."

"I'm not likely to," answered Don, smiling. He was sure the Persian was a trifle cracked. "You're not going to carry firearms, are you?" he asked, with a vague fear that the visit might result in a tragedy.

Sudh Hafiz smiled and shook his head. "We have no use for such primitive methods," he answered. "You can not destroy evil by violence. But"—here he leaned forward in his chair and spoke so impressively that Don was for the moment almost startled into believing in what he had told him—"it is essential that you keep your head, Wentworth, whatever happens. Godfrey Moore will be measuring you, endeavoring to discover whether you are an enemy to be reckoned with seriously. Do not let yourself be appalled by anything—anything at all. You understand?"

"You can rely on me," answered Don, smiling. "But I wish you would answer a question I asked you earlier in the day. You said Lorna had changed. Won't you explain just what you meant? You didn't mean — mentally affected, did you?"

Sudh Hafiz regarded him gravely and compassionately. "I wish I could answer you as you want me to," he said. "She is —yes, she is to some extent unbalanced as the result of what she has gone through. But, my friend, do not ask me to commit myself to words and phrases. Soon you shall see her, and then you will be able to judge for yourself."

SUDH HAFIZ was modern enough to possess a smooth-running eight-cylinder car, which ate up the twenty miles or so between Cannonville and Godfrey Moore's home. A few miles outside the town began the extensive pine forests that still cover most of the southern portion of the state.

Here and there were turpentine camps, convict and otherwise, and here and there were the cabins of negroes, set beside the road, primitive, single-room structures housing parents and a numerous progeny,

who came to the door to see the car speeding past. And presently the sea came into view.

The road, though paved, ran through a swampy region that seemed untrodden of man. Not even a negro cabin appeared anywhere under the light of the full moon, riding high in the heavens. The sea, hardly distinguishable from the swamps that bordered it, looked inky black. There was not the least sound of the waves as they lapped at the mud shore.

"This is a strange district for a millionaire like Godfrey Moore to choose for his home," said Don.

"Apparently — though actually Mr. Moore has a town apartment where he sees his friends and conducts a good part of his business. He retires here to pursue his investigations in psychic matters. All this land is his, and nobody is allowed on it. Even the negroes give it a wide berth. For the past eight miles we have been driving on Moore's private road."

"Does he live here alone?"

"I believe he has two or three servants who live in mortal terror of him, but are afraid to leave him on account of some power he has over them. Yes, you think it is not the sort of place for Lorna West to have come to. But I know that she is under no constraint, and, as a matter of fact, it is not to be regretted that she came here. We shall see the house in a minute," Sudh Hafiz added.

The road swept round in a wide curve, running up one side of a wide, shallow estuary. Now the sound of the sea could be heard. It was sucking, sucking at the mud of the flats ceaselessly. Here and there were pools of dark water that the receding tide had left behind it. In this desolate spot not a tree was visible; nothing grew except the rank sea-grass.

Then of a sudden the house came into view. Don saw a long, low, two-story building, apparently of considerable age, set back some distance from the foreshore, against the foot of a low bluff. About it rose gigantic live-oaks, and as the car drew near it could be seen that they were covered with long streamers of Spanish moss. A single light was burning in a window on one side.

So desolate was the scene, the mud flats on three sides and the bluff behind, so sinister was the impression that Don received from the lonely place, that he shuddered involuntarily.

"You get the atmosphere?" asked Sudh Hafiz. "The impressions that you derive are due to the fact that this was formerly a center of Obeah worship, which is still believed to be carried on by the negroes in the depths of the forest. That is one reason why Godfrey Moore selected it for his residence. It belonged to an old Colonial family whose men were killed off in the Civil War. Ah!" he ejaculated.

For of a sudden, as if Moore was aware of their advent, the whole building became ablaze with lights. So swift was the transition that Don cried out too. They transformed the dark, desolate place.

THE car passed two wide-open gates and began to sweep up the curved driveway between markers of white stone. The ancient live-oaks trailed their long festoons, which brushed against the sides of the car. There was nothing like a lawn, and everywhere was the smell of decaying vegetation.

Then, as the car purred to a stop in front of the house, the door flew wide open, and a man in evening clothes stood revealed in the blaze of light from within. He came slowly down the steps, and Sudh Hafiz got out and went up to take his outstretched hand.

Don caught a good sight of Godfrey Moore's face as he prepared to get out

likewise. It was that of a man of about fifty-five to sixty years of age. But there was nothing in the least repellent about it, nothing that tallied with the Persian's lurid description of Moore's character. On the contrary, it was handsome, cultured, and combined power with benevolence. The thick hair was only slightly graying, but the slight mustache was nearly white.

Godfrey Moore, even at his age, was certainly a very handsome man, and if he was indeed the monster of evil that Sudh Hafiz claimed him to be, it had left no traces on his kindly and aristocratic features.

"Mr. Moore, permit me to introduce my friend, Mr. Wentworth," said the Persian.

Godfrey Moore extended his hand and shook Don's cordially. "I'm delighted to meet you, sir," he said. "In fact, I've been expecting you ever since we had news that you had sailed from China."

Don looked at him in blank astonishment. "But I sent no word——" he began. Then, "You must be referring to the messages I radioed to Miss West. How is she?"

Godfrey Moore laid a hand on Don's shoulder. "Much better than she has been, though she was in no condition to answer your radios," he replied. "Most eager to meet you again, although very much overwrought by the sad events of the past year, culminating in the distressing tragedy—but I don't need to dwell on that. Come in! My butler is away at present. May I not take your hat and coat?"

He ushered them into an anteroom. "A cocktail, gentlemen?" he asked. Then, as Sudh Hafiz declined, and Don hesitated, "A little later, then," he said. "You will be eager to meet Miss West."

Again his hand fell in kindly fashion on Don's shoulder. Godfrey Moore a monster of wickedness? Don was sure now that Sudh Hafiz was mentally deranged. He rejected everything that he had told him.

The interior of the house was sumptuous, almost regal. Oriental rugs of rare quality covered the floors. Old masters hung upon the walls. Suits of antique armor hung in the wide hall. Godfrey Moore led the way into a Louis Quinze drawing-room, beyond which could be seen several other rooms, shut off by curtains.

Moore's hand still rested on Don's shoulder, detaining him.

"Miss West has not been quite herself for some time past," he said. "I'm sure you'll understand. I'm going to be perfectly frank with you, my dear fellow. Toward the end of her long and distressing experience she—well, broke down. In fact, the doctors were considering removing her to a—a home. A public institution, I mean. You see, there was practically no money left after the heavy expenses of the trial.

"I'd known West well, and so I had her brought here rather than let her—but you'll know what I mean. Happily she is making a very good recovery. You will, of course, make no allusion—well, I hardly need to tell you that. I'm sure she'll know you. Fortunately, she seems to recall little of what has happened, and the doctors think that is a good sign."

He pointed to some blue velvet portieres that shut off the room from the one beyond. "You'll find her in there, Wentworth," he said.

Don felt his heart beating almost uncontrollably as he advanced toward the curtains. Reaching them, he stopped for a moment to pull himself together, then raised them and passed through.

He was only conscious of Lorna, lovely as ever, and unchanged. She was wearing a superb evening gown, and she sat in an armchair, one arm hanging over the side, looking at nothing in particular. She turned her head as Don approached.

"Lorna!" he whispered. "You know me, Lorna?"

She inclined her head and smiled. "Why, of course I know you, Don," she answered, "and I feel very guilty not to have answered your radios. I'm so negligent about things like that nowadays, rusticating here in such a lazy way. How have you been, my dear boy?"

She waved him to a chair beside her. Her glance was friendly, almost affectionate, but Don's worst fears were confirmed. This was not Lorna—not the Lorna he had known and loved. Something was gone from her!

Swallowing the lump in his throat, and forcing a smile to his face, Don seated himself beside her.

"I'm so glad you managed to get free from those horrid brigands," she said. "You must tell me all about your experiences when you were their prisoner. Not now, but when I'm a little stronger."

"I certainly will," answered Don. He took the little hand that was hanging over the chair. "I'm so glad to see you, dear," he said. "I've been so anxious about you, especially when I didn't get any answer to my radiograms. But of course I didn't know how ill you had been."

"Yes, I was too ill to answer you, Don," said Lorna, raising her eyes and looking at him for the first time in a puzzled way. Suddenly Don had a curious feeling as if everything that she said to him had been learned by rote, and had not the smallest significance for her. That look of puzzlement was the first sign of something breaking through the outward mask.

"But I'm getting much better now," said Lorna, "thanks to Mr. Moore. He has done so much for me, and really I don't deserve it at all. He and poor father were not particularly intimate. It was a terrible end for him," she added, dropping her voice to a whisper. "They think I have forgotten about it, but I haven't. Only we never speak about it. And, after all, he deserved his fate, didn't he?"

Don looked at the girl in horror. This wasn't Lorna! No, this wasn't she! An automaton, voicing things that had been put into her mind. Why, Lorna was the very incarnation of loyalty itself!

He couldn't help the reply that burst from his lips. "No, Lorna, your father didn't deserve his fate," he answered, "because he wasn't guilty."

She looked full at him, and, as a bird's eyes grow clear after filming, so her eyes seemed to clear. For the first time Don knew that he was looking at the old Lorna, the girl he loved.

"Don!" she whispered. "Don, help me, Don! Where am I? Don, save me!"

In the room behind him, Don could hear the sudden arrest of Moore's movements. He knew that he had heard the change in the girl's tone, had stopped to listen. Lorna seemed conscious of it. A strangled cry broke from her lips. Terror was in her eyes.

Then suddenly her whole body shuddered, and she fell back in her chair. Next moment Godfrey Moore had come quickly into the room, with Sudh Hafiz at his heels. He bent over the recumbent girl and passed his hand three or four times over her face.

"There, there," he said soothingly. "It was too much of a shock for you, meeting Mr. Wentworth after all this long absence, wasn't it?"

Lorna's eyes opened. But they were not

the eyes of the old Lorna now; the film was over them again.

"Yes, yes," the girl answered confusedly. "I overtaxed my strength." She laughed vacantly, and she looked at Don as if he had been a stranger.

Godfrey Moore looked at Don and Sudh Hafiz. "Our little patient has been recovering marvelously, but she is still far from strong," he said. "We must show our guests the new television outfit that arrived yesterday, mustn't we, Lorna?"

Lorna sprang up and clapped her hands like a delighted child. "Oh, yes, Mr. Wentworth will enjoy that," she answered.

She ran through the curtains to the radio cabinet in the corner. "We've been having the greatest time with it," she said. "You know, Uncle Godfrey is an inventor himself, and he's been working independently on television."

"But I confess that I've been left very far behind," said Godfrey Moore, "since this instrument was put on the market.

"What's that?" he added sharply, as the sound of a motor-car was heard without. "Excuse me a few moments, gentlemen. Please make yourselves at home. I'll be with you in a moment."

WITH his departure, Lorna seemed to fall back into the same state of apathy as before. She went back into the second drawing-room and reseated herself in the chair. Sudh Hafiz laid his fingers on Don's arm.

"You see, Wentworth," he said, "she is in no condition to understand very much."

Don looked at him resentfully. At the moment he saw Sudh Hafiz only as an insane man, and Godfrey Moore as the man who had taken Lorna into his home, to save her from the madhouse. The Persian seemed to read what was passing in his mind.

"Be on your guard! Remember my warnings!" he said curtly.

Next moment they heard the rumbling, bass tones of an Italian voice in the hall, and Moore reappeared, accompanied by a flashily dressed man in a loud check suit, with a diamond tie-pin and two enormous stones on his little finger. The face was a blend of power and cunning. Altogether, the man looked as unpleasant a customer as one might find in many a moon.

"Gentlemen," said Godfrey Moore suavely, "permit me to make you acquainted with my friend, Mr. Moroni. Moroni —Mr. Sudh Hafiz, the minister at the temple. And Mr. Don Wentworth."

"Wentworth?" asked Moroni, with something between a laugh and a snarl. "Ain't I heard of you? Friend of our late departed senator, wasn't you? Engaged to his daughter? Oh, yeah! Well, I guess that's over, ain't it?"

"Miss West is in the next room," said Don coldly.

Moroni stared at him belligerently, and Moore intervened. "Now about that order——" he began.

"Yeah, just whatever you want to make it, Mr. Moore," replied the Italian, a sort of unwilling deference in his tone.

"Suppose we make it a dozen cases of Martell's, and a dozen of champagne, Veuve Clicquot, brut," said Moore. "It is no secret, gentlemen," he added, "that Mr. Moroni is one of our great public benefactors—that is to say, his business is ministering to one of the great primary needs of man."

"And you said a mouthful, Mr. Moore," replied Moroni. "I got the bootleg racket in this state sewed up in a bundle. I do all the business, and when I say all, I mean all."

"Mr. Moroni has been so kind as to

pay me a personal visit——" began Moore.

"Just so you won't git stuck with no gooseberry or bum cider," said Moroni. "I know how a gentleman feels when he's paid for something he didn't git. Yeah, I'd go a good ways to oblige a good customer like you, Mr. Moore. A dozen brandy and a dozen champagne goes. I got the stuff lying handy up one of the creeks, and I can shoot it in some time before morning, if you'll leave your barn door open."

"Going back to town, Moroni?" asked Moore.

"Yeah, why?" replied the other suspiciously.

"If you're in no hurry, why don't you stay a while and join us here. They're broadcasting *La Sonnambula* in a few minutes. Lily Pons is singing. I guess I know your tastes pretty well, Moroni. Wouldn't you like to see her?"

"See her? Hear her, you mean," said Moroni.

"I said 'See her'," replied Moore imperturbably. "This is the latest thing in a television outfit."

He turned toward the radio cabinet that stood in one corner. At that moment Lorna came into the room, walking like one in a trance.

"Lorna, my dear, you know Mr. Moroni," said Godfrey. "One of your father's friends. We're going to show him the new television set."

Moroni executed an awkward bow, his eyes flashing in momentary surprize and appraisal to Moore's. Lorna, with an exclamation of delight, went to the cabinet, opened it, and disclosed the dials, the wave-length register, and what looked like a sheet of polished silver along the front.

"Come, gentlemen, let's draw up our chairs," suggested Moore. "Lorna loves to operate it. This set is not yet on the market. It's going over like wildfire as soon as it gets into the public's hands."

THEY appeared to be just in time, for as soon as Lorna had tuned in, the voice of the announcer was heard, informing them that *La Sonnambula* was about to begin. Moore rose and pressed the button that controlled the lights, throwing the room into darkness, save for the moonlight streaming through the window. Instantly the sheet of polished metal on the front of the cabinet became aglow, and the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House came into view, with the figures of the actors.

Moroni uttered an exclamation of delight. "Why, it's as real as being there!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it's a pretty good set," answered Moore.

Don sat watching and listening with a good deal of pleasure. He was fond of music, and he was quite convinced by now that Sudh Hafiz was a harmless madman; at which stage of his thoughts Moore, who was seated next to him, leaned toward him.

"Our Persian friend is a good fellow, but touched," he whispered, tapping his forehead. "Harmless, though. We're making arrangements with his consul to have him sent back home. It's rather sad —a love affair with an American girl, and her parents took her abroad to break it off."

Don nodded. He felt very close to Godfrey Moore at that moment. "Do they think Lorna——" He hesitated.

"I have every hope for her," replied Moore in a low whisper. "I am trying to divert her mind. She is rather bitter against her father; you see, she believed in him till the last, when he confessed to her. That was what unhinged her."

"Sh-sh-sh!" came Mike Moroni's voice indignantly. Bootlegger though he was, he had all the Italian's love of music, and was following the performance with close attention. Godfrey Moore leaned back in his chair and relapsed into silence. Don could not see Sudh Hafiz, on the other side of him.

Lily Pons' clear, sweet voice rang out. The figures were astonishingly life-like, though they were only silhouettes. Don, while listening to the music, let his mind stray to ponder over the situation. He felt a certain sense of relief. At least the worst had not happened, for Lorna was still alive. And Moore had held out the hope of her complete recovery.

He would have liked to take her away, marry her, care for her until she had recovered. It was hard to see the girl he loved in that mental state. The most terrible part of it was that something in her was missing. That she no longer seemed to care for him was bearable, but he did not like the cold dislike with which she had spoken of her father, whom she had almost worshipped, despite his associations.

The moonlight was slowly shifting. Don could now see Lorna's hair, the gold turned to silver. And slowly her features came into profile.

Suddenly he gripped the arms of his chair hard. That profile, the firm outlines—it was only a trick of imagination, of course, due to his wrought-up state, but for a moment it had looked exactly like that of Senator West!

Now he could see the whole of Lorna's face. No, it was Lorna's. But Lorna seemed transformed. Her face had become a mask of diabolical energy, of hate. There was something fearful in the intensity of that hatred. Cold fear began to grip Don as he watched her, invisible as yet to the three others.

Lorna slowly turned her head. Her eyes met Don's, but there was no recognition in them. Again that was the face of Senator West. A strangled gasp broke from Don's lips. It was the white face he had seen in the porthole that day aboard ship, the terror of death in the protruding eyes, but more than terror—hate incarnate!

Slowly the film of vision began to blur. Slowly the actors faded out, though the music went on without a pause. Even the brightness of that metal strip had vanished. Don could see nothing, and Lorna had drawn back a little into the shadows.

"Is it not marvelously clear?" said Sudh Hafiz suddenly.

"I couldn't have believed it," answered Moroni. "Why, you can see her earrings! I bet there's a fortune in them stones!"

"It's pretty good, isn't it, Wentworth?" said Godfrey Moore.

Don turned toward the three in amazement. Were they amusing themselves at his expense? Hadn't the film faded for them as well as for him? In Sudh Hafiz's voice there had been a subtle intonation that had somehow, he knew not how, put Don on guard. He had felt that an affirmative answer was expected of him, that the Persian wanted him to pretend he still saw.

In Moore's voice, on the other hand, there had been a sort of challenge, as if the millionaire wanted Don to say he no longer saw the film.

But Mike Moroni—surely the bootlegger no longer saw the picture on the metal?

"It's wonderful," Don answered, and felt Moore's eyes searching his own in the darkness.

On and on went the voices, with Lily Pons' raised in exquisite song, while Moroni interposed excited comments, though for Don the metal plate was quite dark.

And then suddenly it began to glow for him again.

Slowly a shadowy picture began to be imprinted on it once again. Another scene? What were those many figures doing, grouped together in one corner of the picture, when Lily Pons was singing solo, and should have occupied the stage alone?

But was that Lily Pons, occupying the center of the strip? It looked more like a man, standing in a constrained position.

Don strained his eyes, trying to figure out what the picture showed, but he could see little, for it flickered and grew lighter and darker alternately, and his eyes ached with the effort. But now again Lorna's face had come into view in the moonlight, and the look of hate that had been stamped upon it before was as nothing in comparison with the intensity of hatred now.

Why, it was the face of a devil!

"This is the famous scene, Wentworth," Don heard Moore say in his ear, "where la Sonnambula walks in her sleep, carrying a lighted candle. Is it not wonderful? What an actress Lily is, as well as singer!"

"*Bravo!* Superb!" cried Mike Moroni. "See the grace with which she holds the candle. Each moment it looks as if she would let it fall, and yet one knows she will not let it fall!"

Don bent forward, trying in vain to see the bootlegger's face in the darkness. Was it credible that he saw all that, when Don saw nothing but flickers on the strip of metal? Or were his eyes simply tired?

Then, slowly but steadily, the picture began to grow bright again. For a whole minute Don was unable to make out what it depicted. But it certainly did not show Lily Pons in the *Sonnambula* scene. It showed a yard, a large yard surrounded by a high wall, on which a man was pacing.

It was growing brighter yet. It showed a little group of men standing together on one corner of it. It showed a man ascending some steps beneath a mistily outlined structure, and taking his place there. It showed—merciful God!—it showed the execution of Senator West in the yard of the state penitentiary at Hornell, exactly as Don had seen it in his vision aboard the *President Harrison!*

APPALLED, paralyzed, Don watched the awful scene from beginning to end. He saw the clergyman beside the condemned man, reading from a book, and West responding with his lips. He saw the hangman adjust the cap over West's head. A moment's interval, and he saw him press the lever that released the trap. He saw the body shoot down into the hole and disappear, the rope above it quivering convulsively.

And all the while Lily Pons' sweet song went on and on. Mike Moroni was clapping his hands vigorously.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" he cried. "This sure is an evening's genuine pleasure you give me, Mr. Moore!"

Don, gripping the arms of his chair, with hands white at the knuckles, saw the grisly picture apparently fixed on the metal. Was he going insane? Was he actually the only person who had seen that sight? Was it nothing but a projection from his own brain?

But Don was not the type of man who is easily thrown off his balance. Whether he was mad or sane, he realized the need of infinite caution. Neither the horror of the picture nor the fearful look on Lorna's face elicited a word from him, though his heart was hammering wildly, and the sweat stood out in beads on his forehead.

He was trying to remember Sudh Hafiz's warning to him earlier in the day. "Magician's tricks"—yes, that was what

he had said about Moore. And "Don't let yourself be perturbed."

He wouldn't. He sat there, watching. For an instant there flashed through his mind the idea that it might all be a ghastly jest of Moore's, with Moroni in the secret. But the Italian's exclamations of delight were too unfeigned for that.

Again he felt that Moore's eyes were searching his, but he betrayed himself by neither sound nor movement. With eyes pinned on the awful picture, he just waited. Something must happen soon, something to break that spell, for Lorna's face was terrible.

If hate could kill, the hatred in her eyes was murder. And she was bending closer to the filmy picture. Now the moonlight illumined the whole of her face.

It was no longer Lorna. It was Senator West, alive! Alive in death! A living dead man, reborn in his daughter's face. It couldn't go on! Don gripped the arms of his chair more tightly. He was on the verge of rushing forward, seizing Lorna in his arms, and carrying her away. And then he saw that the picture had ceased to be static. Something was happening. The rope that held West's body was beginning to vibrate.

It moved. It began to quiver upward, as if it was being drawn back upon a pulley. Only the rope was moving, neither priest nor hangman nor prison governor, nor any of the group motionless in the yard. The very sentry on the wall had ceased to pace to and fro.

But the rope was moving upward, and now there appeared the head of the hanged man, still confined in the cap, lolling grotesquely upon the neck, then the body, and then the legs. Once more he hung, suspended high in air over the open trap.

Lorna was bending forward so that her face was almost against the strip of metal. Her face? No, *his* face, West's hate-distorted face, leaning against the face beneath the cap.

But the picture was growing larger! Slowly it changed until it covered the whole front of the radio cabinet. Larger yet, until the figures stood out life-size on the wall. Was the music still going on? Don did not know; he never knew; it was more than terror gripped him now, it was a palsy like that in a nightmare—like that in his cabin aboard the ship. He was no longer conscious of the presence of the others. He only saw the girl he loved, with her face against the cap, and the dangling thing, and the motionless forms of the spectators.

Then in an instant the thing happened for which he had subconsciously waited. The cap was gone. And Lorna's face was no longer that of her father. Don saw her collapse in her chair with a sigh and lie there apparently unconscious, her white face, sweet as it had always been within Don's memory, upturned to the moonlight. And the Thing no longer dangled from the rope. It was gone!

As a light fades when the button is snapped, so the picture faded. All was blank; and Don sat there, gripping the arms of his chair, trying to force his muscles to obey his will, to run to Lorna's side.

He could not stir. And something evil was in the room, something that had emerged from the picture. He knew what it was—who it was! The dead man, galvanized into life by the mighty power of his hatred and longing for revenge!

He saw it! A stealthy, moving shadow, vanishing as it crossed the moonlight instead of growing clearer, reappearing as it reached the darkness. Something barely perceptible, and yet darker than the dark; moving, bent half-double, with neck that lolled crookedly upon its shoulders.

A cry from Mike Moroni broke the silence, a strangled cry deep in his throat. The spell that held Don fast was gone. He leaped to his feet.

"The lights!" he cried. "The lights!" And as he spoke he heard something fall heavily.

Next moment a blaze of electric light filled the room, disclosing Lorna unconscious in her chair beside the radio, and Mike Moroni slumped down on the floor in front of his chair.

Don ran to his side, but Godfrey Moore was already bending over him. The dead man's face was set in a convulsion, there was a fleck of foam upon his lip, and on either side of his throat were faint traces of bruising.

Moore raised a limp hand and felt for the pulse; he opened Moroni's shirt and laid his ear against his heart. He looked up at Don and Sudh Hafiz.

"He's gone," he said in agitated tones. "It was the excitement. His heart must have snapped—like that!"

How could death come to Mike Moroni at the hands of the phantom from the television outfit? What is the relationship between Lorna West and her dead father? she the minister of his vengeance? And what are the parts played by Godfrey Moore and Sudh Hafiz in the unfolding drama? Order your copy of the August WEIRD TALES from your dealer now. On sale at all news stands.

Echidna

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

Who has seen Echidna
  Where the swamp ooze dries,
Where the swamp things slither
  In the wan moonrise?
Who has seen Echidna's
  Eyes?

Who has heard Echidna,
  In the scaly guise
Of a black swamp serpent,
  Hiss her wind-soft sighs?
Who has heard Echidna
  Flies!

Who has seen Echidna
  With her bright black eyes,
As her serpent body
  In the swamp mud lies?
Who has seen Echidna
  Dies!

"The leopard leaped high into the air, then fell heavily to the ground."

The Man Who Never Came Back

By PEARL NORTON SWET

A shuddery story of a weird horror in the heart of the Black Continent

WE WALKED, prosaically enough, in a city park zoo, Bannister and I. It was autumn, golden, opulent. We were content in friendship, and London seemed a good and peaceful place.

Passing the leopard cages, Bannister looked quickly away from the sleek and yawning cats and swore emphatically in a voice that shook with a surprizing emotion.

"—— —— their spotted hides! I hate the damned beasts! Come, let's get away from the sight of them."

"Why?" I asked curiously and somewhat surprized at this show of feeling in the suavely handsome Bannister. Bannister was, and is, the vice-president of the British West Coast Products Company; learned the business "from the ground up," as the saying is. He was too valuable a man to waste in equatorial Africa. The company has him in London, where he has become a sedate husband and father, living in an equally sedate suburb.

What had *he* to do with leopards? So I asked again, "Why? What have you against leopards, anyway?"

We found a green bench far from the leopards' cages and Bannister told me, through that golden afternoon, the story of Herbie Tillson. Flirtatious nursemaids trundled their infant charges past our bench; a beggar stopped and whined for money; a gray squirrel, pertly curious and unafraid, came to squat beside us, hopeful of food.

These things went on about us, but while Bannister talked, I scarcely realized that we sat in a park with evidences of civilization thick about us. And there was sometimes sadness and sometimes bitterness in Bannister's voice as he told me about Herbie Tillson.

When Herbie Tillson arrived on a cargo-boat at Pambia on the West Coast of equatorial Africa, he looked exactly what he was—a colorless, little, twenty-four-year-old London clerk who had been seasick all the way out from England.

Herbie Tillson was in that region so aptly called "the white man's graveyard," because, like a good many other clerks in musty London offices, he wanted a colorful and virile life. He happened to have some business connections that finally landed him in the five-room frame bungalow at Pambia that was the West Coast Products Company's stronghold on the Guinea coast. And he thought Pambia must be colorful and virile.

There were living-quarters and offices and two men besides Bannister—Vierling and the red-headed Irishman, O'Donnel. The three who greeted Herbie at Pambia had slightly different views about Pambia, having been there a bit longer than they cared to be.

And then along came Herbie Tillson with his deprecatory manner and pale blond appearance—Herbie Tillson who thought that Pambia on the West Coast of Africa would give him color and glamor to dress up his life of drabness. So Bannister and the two others thought perhaps they had better tell Herbie right away that there was no such thing as colorful glamor in Pambia.

They thought they had better tell him that there were, though, plenty of dirty, sneaking Bendjabis, so steeped in superstition as to be afraid of their own shadows; that Pambia had tremendous, deluging rains that later, under terrific sun, made the land steam and give off a nauseating odor of decay. They would have liked to tell Herbie Tillson that the relentless ocean that was the foreground of this picture could, on an unusually hot day, take on a brassy look that made men dizzy and that the background of the Great Swabi forest harbored fearful beasts and still more fearful men in the eternal twilight of its swollen jungle.

But not one of the three could find it in his heart to tell Herbie any of these things. They reasoned that he'd learn it soon enough. The West Coast Products Company paid well, but there always came a time in the life of every Englishman who had ever come to Pambia, when he would quite willingly have given an

arm or a leg or even an eye for the opportunity of whiffing the damp, cool air of a London street, say on an autumn evening with the lights of the *Yorkshire Evening Post* glimmering down Fleet Street and the busses trundling by and the electric signs flashing.

That was the state to which they all had been reduced after a year or so in Pambia, that lay along a little river bank against which the jungle pushed. Bannister and Vierling and O'Donnel could see no reason why Herbie Tillson wouldn't, in time, be drooling about the lovely lime-juice signs in Picadilly and yearning for a sight of the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street.

Herbie Tillson put on a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles and went to work with an apparent zest that made the other three stick their tongues in their cheeks knowingly. They thought Herbie looked a good deal like a thin, serious insect in those big spectacles; razzed him a bit about them in a good-natured way.

"Well, you see, I have to wear glasses —in the daytime," explained Herbie. "In the dark I don't need 'em."

"D'ye mean to say you can see in the dark better than in the light?" asked O'Donnel.

"Just that," replied Herbie. "You know, my eyes are a bit queer."

He took off his spectacles and turned to O'Donnel, and it was then that O'Donnel noticed for the first time that the pupils of Herbie Tillson's eyes were not round. They were elliptical, narrowing to slits in the daylight and giving out a hint of phosphorescence that was all but dimmed at that afternoon hour.

"So," said Herbie, putting on his spectacles again, "you see I really need the glasses, funny as they are, if I am to see well in the daylight."

"But you can see well at night, eh?" persisted the Irishman, curiously.

"Oh, quite." Herbie bent over his ledger, and as far as he was concerned the conversation was closed.

THE three at Pambia had been so long without stimulus, comic or otherwise, that the coming of Herbie Tillson gave them something to talk about.

"I'm beginning to think the spalpeen's a walkin' curiosity shop," said O'Donnel one morning, pausing in his work. "I got something to tell you, and since he's not here right now, I'll tell it."

He leaned forward in his chair toward Bannister's desk, and his face was comically mysterious. "The lad's not content with cat's eyes—he must have six toes on the foot of him—the left foot. I saw it with my own eyes when we swam two mornings ago."

As time went on and it became autumn, Pambia daily expected the rains and dragged to cover its few possessions. And at about that time Herbie Tillson began to take his solitary walks after dinner. He would leave the others playing a three-handed card game, or reading month-old copies of the *London Post*, and Herbie would go for a solitary walk, always toward the green, miasmic twilight that was the jungle.

They warned him. He smiled at them a shade pityingly. "Why, I have no fear of the jungle. I can't just explain, but I feel often that I should be very much at home in the jungle. But there's something — I don't know — no doubt you think me a bit dotty."

They assured him with admirable candor that they did think so. But he didn't mind. He took his walks just the same.

And then the rains came, and there were no more walks for Herbie Tillson. Instead, while the rain fell monotonously and drummed on the roof like a giant bumble-bee, Herbie spent his evenings

hunched over books, which it soon became clear he wasn't reading.

When the Bendjabis, wet and miserable and coughing, came to beg quinine from Bannister, Herbie Tillson astonished them by trying to make friends. He persisted till a pot-bellied youth named Molu, but lately made house-boy at the bungalow, was won to a shy, animal-like friendship. One other, also, Herbie came to know—a black, lowering fellow, not of the Bendjabis, but said to come from the dread M'Banos who lived in the Great Swabi forest.

The M'Bano was in exile from his own people and tolerated by the Bendjabis only through fear and superstitious dread of a M'Bano's *gri-gri,* or spell. The sign language and jabberings of Herbie and the M'Bano filled Vierling and O'Donnel with a comical disgust.

"What does he want to chum up with a dirty, black M'Bano for? Why doesn't he spend the wet season readin' *Punch* or improvin' his mind some way?"

But Bannister saw more than they. He thought he saw in Herbie Tillson a loneliness so infinite that mere civilized talk with his own kind could not satisfy it. He felt, in a strange, repelling flash of knowledge, that Herbie Tillson was not one of them; that his puny personality held something which would be difficult for them to understand. So Bannister did not ridicule Herbie, but he watched him silently, as Herbie drank in the tales that Molu and the black M'Bano so laboriously told him.

As soon as the rains were over and the land lay lushly green and panting under hot suns, Herbie began his jungle prowlings again. He went sometimes alone, and twice he went with the exiled M'Bano.

He was gone one night till after ten, so that the others were on the point of setting out to find him. But as they talked of it, Herbie returned. He came into the hall noiselessly out of the dark and stepped just inside the room where the others sat.

Herbie stood blinking at them, and they noted that he was not wearing his spectacles. His clothes were soiled with soft earth; his fair hair was wildly tousled. He was breathing hard, his mouth slightly opened, showing his strong, white teeth.

"Heavens, man! Where have you been?" They all three rose from their chairs and stared at Herbie.

For answer he turned those strange eyes of his full upon them in a sort of unseeing glare and brushed his chin sidewise in a queer manner against his left shoulder. His teeth bared themselves still more in something that was not quite a laugh and not quite a snarl. And abruptly turning, he re-entered the little hall and strode into his room, slamming the door.

"Whew!" exclaimed O'Donnel.

"Just that," said Vierling and raised his eyebrows. "You don't think our little Herbie has been drinking from the Bendjabi gourds?"

"No," said Bannister, shortly. "No. It's not drink. I—I've seen something like this once before. What a damned country this West Coast is, anyway!"

The other two were reticent for once; seemed to sense that Bannister would tolerate no curious questions. He stood at the door, looking into the hallway, and then he said without turning, "Don't say anything to Herbie, will you? I think it best not to speak of it. Good-night."

Bannister's room was next to Herbie's, and before he entered his own room, Bannister paused a second, as if listening. Then he went into his own room and softly closed the door.

Herbie Tillson was up early the next morning and in the office long before the others had begun work. He

had not come in for breakfast. Bannister entered the office quietly and went up to Herbie as he stood before a large calendar on the wall. With a thick blue pencil Herbie was marking a circle about a date.

He did not notice Bannister, till Bannister laid a hand on his thin shoulder. "Sorry you don't feel so good, old fellow. Better go in now and let Molu bring you a bite of breakfast."

But Herbie shook his head. "No, thanks. I'm quite all right." It was apparent that he wanted to be let alone.

Bannister's sharp eyes found opportunity to glance at the marked date on the big calendar. It was the twenty-fourth, the date of the full moon. When Bannister saw that, he looked at Herbie very hard and shut his mouth tightly to a thin line. For Bannister had been in the West Coast country for some time, and he knew a thing or two about it. But he kept his thoughts to himself.

Things went along in a sort of strained way at the offices of the West Coast Products Company, what with Herbie going about like a half-sick, little shadow and Bannister watching him with eyes that seemed to brood.

Vierling and O'Donnel were inclined to think that the long, dreary season of rains had brought an acute melancholy to Herbie Tillson. They knew, well enough, that was the usual reaction of the Britisher to Pambia's rains.

One evening they said as much to Bannister. It was terribly, suffocatingly hot. The day had been a trying one; the evening was buzzing with myriad insects. The three men sat indoors behind the protecting screens and smoked and talked, while each wondered how Herbie Tillson could endure the pest-ridden heat and stench of a jungle night.

For Herbie had disappeared, soon after dinner, hatless, shirtless, as nonchalant as if bound for a walk in Hyde Park. He had gone straight across the river ford and at the steamy edge of greenness on the other side, Vierling had thought Herbie was joined by the M'Bano. He was not sure, but a shadow had stood at the water's edge and Herbie had joined it and had gone on with it.

"That black devil of a M'Bano has been hanging around here too much lately," said O'Donnel. "Pretends he needs medicines, but he's strong as an ox. D'ye know, some say his father was a leopard-man in the Swabi? Anyway the M'Banos are all rotten. Herbie's a fool to listen to his yarns."

"Yes. And he and Molu always jabbering—all that witch-doctor stuff. Herbie dotes on it. I think the rains have made him dotty." Vierling looked at Bannister, questioningly. "Don't you think so?"

"No, the wet season has nothing to do with the way Herbie's acting," said Bannister, a bit diffidently, as if he hated to talk about Herbie. "But—well, it's a case of the usual Swabi forest stuff—damnable place it is."

"Oh, sure," replied O'Donnel. "That rot they tell you would drive anybody out of his head. Herbie ought to have more sense than——"

At that moment they heard some one come into the hall. Soft footsteps, then a shuffling noise, and outside the door heavy, rasping breathing. Then louder footsteps past their door and the slam of Herbie's door followed by the grate of the lock.

The three men sat absolutely silent. Then Bannister got up and went outside. They heard him exclaim under his breath, and then he came back to the room and motioned for them to join him.

On the vine-shadowed veranda, Bannister turned his flashlight downward.

"Look," he said, in a low tone, and they saw dark tracks clearly marked on the dry boards. They were wet tracks, streaked with soft earth. A leaf lay near the door, no doubt brought in with the freshly made tracks.

O'Donnel bent over the imprints on the veranda. He straightened suddenly, as if struck, and as he always did in excitement, lapsed into the phrases of his religion.

"Mother Mary and the saints preserve us! It's—it's leopard spoors!"

"They're here—and here—and here," said Bannister, still in that guarded tone. "They go from the veranda into the hall. That fool Molu left this screen-door ajar tonight. And, look," he stooped to pick up the leaf that lay on the floor. "This is a leaf from a baobab tree. . . . The baobab tree grows only far in the jungle, in leopard country."

He motioned silently and they followed him into the hall. The flashlight showed plainly the progress of a leopard's padded feet to about the middle of the hall. At that point there was a blur of damp earth stains, and from there on to Herbie Tillson's door the board floor showed the print of a man's wet and muddy shoes—small, neatly fashioned shoes—Herbie Tillson's shoes.

O'Donnel was looking very wild, indeed, as the three went back to the room where they had sat while Herbie went down the hall to his room.

"You can't mean that the beast ran him right here into the middle of his own hall?" he stuttered, lighting a cigarette.

"No, I don't think anything of the sort," replied Bannister, calmly. "After all I know of this West Coast country and all I know of the Swabi forest and those devilish M'Banos, what I'm thinking can be expressed in one word. . . . You probably know what I mean, both of you."

Almost under his breath Vierling said the word, said it fearfully, unbelievingly.

"Lycanthropy! . . . You mean to say it *can* happen? Men *can* change into—into animal form? Surely, Bannister, you're wrought up; you're just a bundle of nerves over this thing. You can't believe any such rot."

"Run along!" scoffed O'Donnel. "Leave that to the natives. Perhaps a dirty M'Bano could change his black body into a beast—but Herbie Tillson is an Englishman, even if he is a deuced queer one."

And Vierling had more to say. "Come now, old fellow. Don't be silly. You're giving us a bit of Africanized Kipling, aren't you?"

"No, I'm not," Bannister almost snapped at him. "Mr. Kipling never dreamed of anything as horrible as these leopard-men out in the Swabi. I've been in this hole three years. It's an evil place, I tell you. There *are* leopard-men out there in the Swabi, and the M'Banos swear that their leaders are humans turned beast by a devilish alchemy which only one man in a thousand may possess."

He strode to the window and raised the blind to the top. He faced the others seriously. "Out there on that vine-shaded veranda we didn't notice, but, you see—it's the full of the moon . . . leopard time and the only time this hideous thing can take place, fully, completely, so that the man is lost and only the beast remains. Believe me, I'm older at this West Coast game than you are. . . . *I know.*"

"I wonder," said Vierling, slowly. "I wonder just why Herbie Tillson came out here."

"Because he couldn't help himself, Vierling. He came out here to this hell because he *had* to come—it was in his

soul." Bannister paused a second and then said, softly, "He has the eyes of a cat."

"Cats! Leopards! You make me positively sick," said O'Donnel, with a wry face.

Bannister rubbed his forehead with his left palm and looked all at once very tired. "You know, I've had this thing on my mind, night and day, ever since I saw Herbie marking the calendar at the date of the full moon. And—when he turned about and looked at me that morning, I'm sure his eyes had changed and were the eyes of a leopard—not cat's eyes, but leopard eyes."

"Next boat is the *Astoria* with Captain Hines in command," said Vierling. Vierling was a very good man at the West Coast Products Company. He knew his work. A bit stolid, perhaps, but all the better for that particular place and job.

"All right," Bannister said, thoughtfully. "When the *Astoria* sails from Pambia, Herbie Tillson will be on board."

"We'll shanghai the young fool," said O'Donnel, emphatically.

"Well, Herbie Tillson will be on board," repeated Bannister. And later Bannister was to remember those words and feel a sadness over them.

If Vierling and O'Donnel had been still skeptical of Bannister's wild surmises, they admitted the next morning that something sinister was at work about Pambia.

The young wife of the house-boy, Molu, was found dead, horribly mutilated, at the river's edge. Molu admitted that she had gone to the edge of the green forest to fetch water. She had gone there at night, too, and ordinarily no one would have thought of venturing near the edge of that noisome place, that had, so the natives claimed, an odor of death at the full of the moon.

But the young wife of Molu had laughed and had ventured to go for water, because the white brilliance of the moon made things light as day and she had thought to fill her jug and return quickly. But she had not returned. The jug of trickling water lay overturned beside her torn body when they found her.

Examining the small dark body the next morning, Bannister said to O'Donnel. "As I thought. The carotid artery is severed. It's a leopard killing."

The whimpering Molu stood near by. He caught at the English words which he understood, and he ceased his whimpering. He straightened, stood tense and listening for a moment, his eyes straining and focussed on the damp, green jungle across the little river. Molu raised one arm high and sailed his necklace of leopard teeth—teeth of his enemy—as far as it would go across the water toward the jungle. It was his gesture of vengeance. Then he turned and went back to his work in the bungalow.

When Bannister and men went back to their work that morning, there was no Herbie perched on his high stool checking cargo-lists.

"He wasn't in to breakfast, was he?" Bannister asked the question quite mechanically. They knew Herbie hadn't been in to breakfast. They hadn't seen him since six o'clock of the evening before.

As one man, the three went down the hall toward Herbie's door and Bannister rapped. There was no response, and so they opened the door and entered.

The bare little room was in prim order. On a wall hung a picture cut from a magazine—a picture of the English royal family. On a table beside the bed was a book and a cheap easel photograph of a girl. Bannister picked it up and looked

at it a long time. The girl was calm-eyed, smooth-haired, and across the picture's base was scrawled, "Lovingly, Rosemary."

"Fancy him with a girl named Rosemary," murmured O'Donnel. "And he never once told us about her."

And then O'Donnel looked at the book's title. It was *The Lays of Ancient Rome.* He laid it down and shook his head. "You must be all wrong, Bannister. Herbie's not—not a case for a witch-doctor."

But Bannister, standing beside the bed which had not been slept in, was gazing out of Herbie's window. The window faced the river and the forest and Bannister seemed to be trying to see far into its steamy greenness.

A feeling of oppression lay over the three men as they tried to go on with their work that day—an oppression amounting almost to a physical weight which bore down upon them in waves of vertigo.

Twenty-four hours later Herbie Tillson had not returned, and Bannister said after dinner, "This can't go on. We'll all be dotty in no time at all. What's the matter with us, anyway? Are *we* afraid of the Swabi, too? Let's go—now—while there is bright moonlight to help us—let's go and find Herbie Tillson."

"We'll go, of course," they told him. And Vierling said, "Better leave a letter here—explaining where we've gone—in case——"

"Yes—in case," said Bannister, grimly.

They took rifles and sharp knives. The knives would help them cut through the tangle of vegetation, and no white man goes without a rifle in the West Coast country.

They put certain drugs and lotions in their kit, with food and drink. And the three set out across the river, under a brilliant moon, to look for Herbie Tillson in the Great Swabi. As they prepared to go, they were thinking of Herbie Tillson as a little London clerk who had come to know the jungle too well. They did not think of him as a monster, a biological freak, a creature of horror. They were remembering the picture of the royal family which Herbie had put upon his wall. They were remembering the girl named Rosemary, and all the decent things that Herbie Tillson stood for came to his aid in their thoughts of him.

They went in darkness some of the time, a darkness that was damply pungent and swarming with insects, shut in by the curtain of the forest. And part of the time they cut their path through jungle ways that were fretted with moonlight.

After an hour's going they came to the edge of a moonlit clearing where the lush grass was bent low. The place was still, and there lay over it a smell, as of hot animal bodies—the smell of the jungle.

The staring moon blazed down on them in such a mad, white fury of light that Bannister fleetingly and irrelevantly wondered why the western world thought moonlight romantically lovely. There was nothing lovely and nothing romantic about this moonlight in the odorous jungle. This moonlight did not move men to amorous thoughts; rather it chilled their marrows in the way that any insane thing might do.

"Well, it's been a long pull and we've seen nothing but a lot of bugs," said Vierling, mopping his brow under the mesh of protecting netting.

"And are we to stop here for long? I don't like the looks—nor the smell—of this particular spot." O'Donnel was a bit peevish.

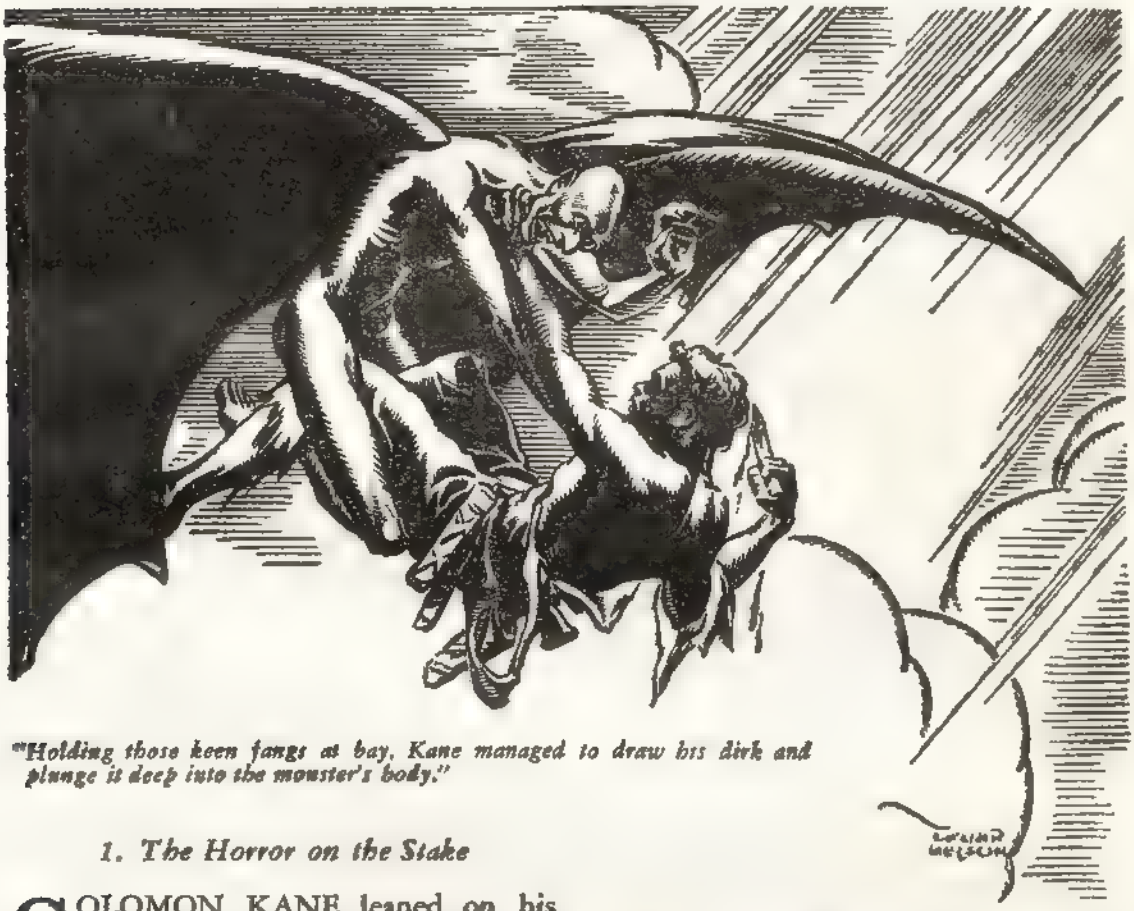
Bannister spoke in a low voice. "Keep quiet. That's leopard smell. I know it. Come, but don't speak."

(Please turn to page 142)

Wings in the Night

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A Solomon Kane story of Darkest Africa and nightmare beings with slavering fangs and talons steeped in shuddersome evil



"Holding those keen fangs at bay, Kane managed to draw his dirk and plunge it deep into the monster's body."

1. The Horror on the Stake

SOLOMON KANE leaned on his strangely carved staff and gazed in scowling perplexity at the mystery which spread silently before him. Many a deserted village Kane had seen in the months that had passed since he turned his face east from the Slave Coast and lost himself in the mazes of jungle and river, but never one like this. It was not famine that had driven away the inhabitants, for yonder the wild rice still grew rank and unkempt in the untilled fields. There were no Arab slave-raiders in this nameless land—it must have been a tribal war that devastated the village, Kane decided, as he gazed somberly at the scattered bones and grinning skulls that littered the space among the rank weeds and grasses. These bones were shattered and splintered and Kane saw jackals and a hyena furtively slinking among the ruined huts. But why had the slayers left the spoils? There lay war spears, their shafts crum-

bling before the attacks of the white ants. There lay shields, moldering in the rains and sun. There lay the cooking-pots, and about the neck-bones of a shattered skeleton glistened a necklace of gaudily painted pebbles and shells—surely rare loot for any savage conqueror.

He gazed at the huts, wondering why the thatch roofs of so many were torn and rent, as if by taloned things seeking entrance. Then something made his cold eyes narrow in startled unbelief. Just outside the moldering mound that was once the village wall towered a gigantic baobab tree, branchless for sixty feet, its mighty bole too large to be gripped and scaled. Yet in the topmost branches dangled a skeleton, apparently impaled on a broken limb. The cold hand of mystery touched the shoulder of Solomon Kane. How came those pitiful remains in that tree? Had some monstrous ogre's inhuman hand flung them there?

Kane shrugged his broad shoulders and his hand unconsciously touched the black butts of his heavy pistols, the hilt of his long rapier, and the dirk in his belt. Kane felt no fear as an ordinary man would feel, confronted with the Unknown and Nameless. Years of wandering in strange lands and warring with strange creatures had melted away from brain, soul and body all that was not steel and whalebone. He was tall and spare, almost gaunt, built with the savage economy of the wolf. Broad-shouldered, long-armed, with nerves of ice and thews of spring steel, he was no less the natural killer than the born swordsman.

The brambles and thorns of the jungle had dealt hardly with him; his garments hung in tatters, his featherless slouch hat was torn and his boots of Cordovan leather were scratched and worn. The sun had baked his chest and limbs to a deep bronze but his ascetically lean face was impervious to its rays. His complexion was still of that strange dark pallor which gave him an almost corpse-like appearance, belied only by his cold, light eyes.

And now Kane, sweeping the village once more with his searching gaze, pulled his belt into a more comfortable position, shifted to his left hand the cat-headed stave N'Longa had given him, and took up his way again.

To the west lay a strip of thin forest, sloping downward to a broad belt of savannas, a waving sea of grass waist-deep and deeper. Beyond that rose another narrow strip of woodlands, deepening rapidly into dense jungle. Out of that jungle Kane had fled like a hunted wolf with pointed-toothed men hot on his trail. Even now a vagrant breeze brought faintly the throb of a savage drum which whispered its obscene tale of hate and bloodhunger and belly-lust across miles of jungle and grassland.

The memory of his flight and narrow escape was vivid in Kane's mind, for only the day before had he realized too late that he was in cannibal country, and all that afternoon in the reeking stench of the thick jungle, he had crept and run and hidden and doubled and twisted on his track with the fierce hunters ever close behind him, until night fell and he gained and crossed the grasslands under cover of darkness. Now in the late morning he had seen nothing, heard nothing of his pursuers, yet he had no reason to believe that they had abandoned the chase. They had been close on his heels when he took to the savannas.

So Kane surveyed the land in front of him. To the east, curving from north to south ran a straggling range of hills, for the most part dry and barren, rising in the south to a jagged black skyline that reminded Kane of the black hills of Negari. Between him and these hills stretched a broad expanse of gently rolling country, thickly treed, but nowhere approaching

the density of a jungle. Kane got the impression of a vast upland plateau, bounded by the curving hills to the east and by the savannas to the west.

Kane set out for the hills with his long, swinging, tireless stride. Surely somewhere behind him the black demons were stealing after him, and he had no desire to be driven to bay. A shot might send them flying in sudden terror, but on the other hand, so low they were in the scale of humanity, it might transmit no supernatural fear to their dull brains. And not even Solomon Kane, whom Sir Francis Drake had called Devon's king of swords, could win in a pitched battle with a whole tribe.

The silent village with its burden of death and mystery faded out behind him. Utter silence reigned among these mysterious uplands where no birds sang and only a silent macaw flitted among the great trees. The only sounds were Kane's cat-like tread, and the whisper of the drum-haunted breeze.

And then Kane caught a glimpse among the trees that made his heart leap with a sudden, nameless horror, and a few moments later he stood before Horror itself, stark and grisly. In a wide clearing, on a rather bold incline stood a grim stake, and to this stake was bound a thing that had once been a black man. Kane had rowed, chained to the bench of a Turkish galley, and he had toiled in Barbary vineyards; he had battled red Indians in the New Lands and had languished in the dungeons of Spain's Inquisition. He knew much of the fiendishness of man's inhumanity, but now he shuddered and grew sick. Yet it was not so much the ghastliness of the mutilations, horrible as they were, that shook Kane's soul, but the knowledge that the wretch still lived.

For as he drew near, the gory head that lolled on the butchered breast lifted and tossed from side to side, spattering blood from the stumps of ears, while a bestial, rattling whimper drooled from the shredded lips.

Kane spoke to the ghastly thing and it screamed unbearably, writhing in incredible contortions, while its head jerked up and down with the jerking of mangled nerves, and the empty, gaping eye-sockets seemed striving to see from their emptiness. And moaning low and brain-shatteringly it huddled its outraged self against the stake where it was bound and lifted its head in a grisly attitude of listening, as if it expected something out of the skies.

"Listen," said Kane, in the dialect of the river-tribes. "Do not fear me—I will not harm you and nothing else shall harm you any more. I am going to loose you."

Even as he spoke Kane was bitterly aware of the emptiness of his words. But his voice had filtered dimly into the crumbling, agony-shot brain of the black man. From between splintered teeth fell words, faltering and uncertain, mixed and mingled with the slavering droolings of imbecility. He spoke a language akin to the dialects Kane had learned from friendly river-folk on his wanderings, and Kane gathered that he had been bound to the stake for a long time—many moons, he whimpered in the delirium of approaching death; and all this time, inhuman, evil things had worked their monstrous will upon him. These things he mentioned by name, but Kane could make nothing of it for he used an unfamiliar term that sounded like *akaana*. But these things had not bound him to the stake, for the torn wretch slavered the name of Gorn, who was a priest and who had drawn a cord too tight about his legs—and Kane wondered that the memory of this small pain should linger through the red mazes of agony that the dying man should whimper over it.

And to Kane's horror, the black spoke of

his brother who had aided in the binding of him, and he wept with infantile sobs, and moisture formed in the empty sockets and made tears of blood. And he muttered of a spear broken long ago in some dim hunt, and while he muttered in his delirium, Kane gently cut his bonds and eased his broken body to the grass. But even at the Englishman's careful touch, the poor wretch writhed and howled like a dying dog, while blood started anew from a score of ghastly gashes, which, Kane noted, were more like the wounds made by fang and talon than by knife or spear. But at last it was done and the bloody, torn thing lay on the soft grass with Kane's old slouch hat beneath its death's-head, breathing in great, rattling gasps.

Kane poured water from his canteen between the mangled lips, and bending close, said: "Tell me more of these devils, for by the God of my people, this deed shall not go unavenged, though Satan himself bar my way."

It is doubtful if the dying man heard. But he heard something else. The macaw, with the curiosity of its breed, swept from a near-by grove and passed so close its great wings fanned Kane's hair. And at the sound of those wings, the butchered black man heaved upright and screamed in a voice that haunted Kane's dreams to the day of his death: "The wings! The wings! They come again! Ahhhh, mercy, *the wings!*"

And the blood burst in a torrent from his lips and so he died.

KANE rose and wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. The upland forest shimmered in the noonday heat. Silence lay over the land like an enchantment of dreams. Kane's brooding eyes ranged to the black, malevolent hills crouching in the distance and back to the far-away savannas. An ancient curse lay over that mysterious land and the shadow of it fell across the soul of Solomon Kane.

Tenderly he lifted the red ruin that had once pulsed with life and youth and vitality, and carried it to the edge of the glade, where arranging the cold limbs as best he might, and shuddering once again at the unnamable mutilations, he piled stones above it till even a prowling jackal would find it hard to get at the flesh below.

And he had scarcely finished when something jerked him back out of his somber broodings to a realization of his own position. A slight sound—or his own wolf-like instinct—made him whirl. On the other side of the glade he caught a movement among the tall grasses—the glimpse of a hideous black face, with an ivory ring in the flat nose, thick lips parted to reveal teeth whose filed points were apparent even at that distance, beady eyes and a low slanting forehead topped by a mop of frizzly hair. Even as the face faded from view Kane leaped back into the shelter of the ring of trees which circled the glade, and ran like a deer-hound, flitting from tree to tree and expecting each moment to hear the exultant clamor of the braves and to see them break cover at his back.

But soon he decided that they were content to hunt him down as certain beasts track their prey, slowly and inevitably. He hastened through the upland forest, taking advantage of every bit of cover, and he saw no more of his pursuers; yet he *knew*, as a hunted wolf knows, that they hovered close behind him, waiting their moment to strike him down without risk to their own hides. Kane smiled bleakly and without mirth. If it was to be a test of endurance, he would see how savage thews compared with his own spring-steel resilience. Let night come and he might yet give them the slip. If not—Kane knew in his heart that the savage essence of the Anglo-Saxon which chafed at his flight, would make him soon turn at bay, though his

pursuers outnumbered him a hundred to one.

The sun sank westward. Kane was hungry, for he had not eaten since early morning when he wolfed down the last of his dried meat. An occasional spring had given him water, and once he thought he glimpsed the roof of a large hut far away through the trees. But he gave it a wide berth. It was hard to believe that this silent plateau was inhabited, but if it were, the natives were doubtless as ferocious as those hunting him. Ahead of him the land grew rougher, with broken boulders and steep slopes as he neared the lower reaches of the brooding hills. And still no sight of his hunters except for faint glimpses caught by wary backward glances—a drifting shadow, the bending of the grass, the sudden straightening of a trodden twig, a rustle of leaves. Why should they be so cautious? Why did they not close in and have it over?

Night fell and Kane reached the first long slopes which led upward to the foot of the hills which now brooded black and menacing above him. They were his goal, where he hoped to shake off his persistent foes at last, yet a nameless aversion warned him away from them. They were pregnant with hidden evil, repellent as the coil of a great sleeping serpent, glimpsed in the tall grass.

DARKNESS fell heavily. The stars winked redly in the thick heat of the tropic night. And Kane, halting for a moment in an unusually dense grove, beyond which the trees thinned out on the slopes, heard a stealthy movement that was not the night wind—for no breath of air stirred the heavy leaves. And even as he turned, there was a rush in the dark, under the trees. A shadow that merged with the shadows flung itself on Kane with a bestial mouthing and a rattle of iron, and the Englishman, parrying by the gleam of the stars on the weapon, felt his assailant duck into close quarters and meet him chest to chest. Lean wiry arms locked about him, pointed teeth gnashed at him as Kane returned the fierce grapple. His tattered shirt ripped beneath a jagged edge, and by blind chance Kane found and pinioned the hand that held the iron knife, and drew his own dirk, flesh crawling in anticipation of a spear in the back.

But even as the Englishman wondered why the others did not come to their comrade's aid, he threw all of his iron muscles into the single combat. Close-clinched they swayed and writhed in the darkness, each striving to drive his blade into the other's flesh, and as the superior strength of the white man began to assert itself, the cannibal howled like a rabid dog, tore and bit. A convulsive spin-wheel of effort pivoted them out into the starlit glade where Kane saw the ivory nose-ring and the pointed teeth that snapped beast-like at his throat. And simultaneously he forced back and down the hand that gripped his knife-wrist, and drove the dirk deep into the black ribs. The warrior screamed and the raw acrid scent of blood flooded the night air. And in that instant Kane was stunned by a sudden savage rush and beat of mighty wings that dashed him to earth, and the black man was torn from his grip and vanished with a scream of mortal agony. Kane leaped to his feet, shaken to his foundation. The dwindling scream of the wretched black sounded faintly *and from above him.*

Straining his eyes into the skies he thought he caught a glimpse of a shapeless and horrific Thing crossing the dim stars —in which the writhing limbs of a human mingled namelessly with great wings and a shadowy shape—but so quickly it was gone, he could not be sure.

And now he wondered if it were not all a nightmare. But groping in the grove he found the ju-ju stave with which he

had parried the short stabbing spear which lay beside it. And here, if more proof was needed, was his long dirk, still stained with blood.

Wings! Wings in the night! The skeleton in the village of torn roofs—the mutilated black man whose wounds were not made with knife or spear and who died shrieking of wings. Surely those hills were the haunt of gigantic birds who made humanity their prey. Yet if birds, why had they not wholly devoured the black man on the stake? And Kane knew in his heart that no true bird ever cast such a shadow as he had seen flit across the stars.

He shrugged his shoulders, bewildered. The night was silent. Where were the rest of the cannibals who had followed him from their distant jungle? Had the fate of their comrade frightened them into flight? Kane looked to his pistols. Cannibals or no, he went not up into those dark hills that night.

Now he must sleep, if all the devils of the Elder World were on his track. A deep roaring to the westward warned him that beasts of prey were a-roam, and he walked rapidly down the rolling slopes until he came to a dense grove some distance from that in which he had fought the cannibal. He climbed high among the great branches until he found a thick crotch that would accommodate even his tall frame. The branches above would guard him from a sudden swoop of any winged thing, and if savages were lurking near, their clamber into the tree would warn him, for he slept lightly as a cat. As for serpents and leopards, they were chances he had taken a thousand times.

Solomon Kane slept and his dreams were vague, chaotic, haunted with a suggestion of pre-human evil and which at last merged into a vision vivid as a scene in waking life. Solomon dreamed he woke with a start, drawing a pistol—for so long had his life been that of the wolf, that reaching for a weapon was his natural reaction upon waking suddenly. And his dream was that a strange, shadowy thing had perched upon a great branch close by and gazed at him with greedy, luminous yellow eyes that seared into his brain. The dream-thing was tall and lean and strangely misshapen, so blended with the shadows that it seemed a shadow itself, tangible only in the narrow yellow eyes. And Kane dreamed he waited, spellbound, while uncertainty came into those eyes and then the creature walked out on the limb as a man would walk, raised great shadowy wings, sprang into space and vanished. Then Kane jerked upright, the mists of sleep fading.

In the dim starlight, under the arching Gothic-like branches, the tree was empty save for himself. Then it had been a dream, after all—yet it had been so vivid, so fraught with inhuman foulness—even now a faint scent like that exuded by birds of prey seemed to linger in the air. Kane strained his ears. He heard the sighing of the night-wind, the whisper of the leaves, the far-away roaring of a lion, but naught else. Again Solomon slept—while high above him a shadow wheeled against the stars, circling again and again as a vulture circles a dying wolf.

2. *The Battle in the Sky*

DAWN was spreading whitely over the eastern hills when Kane woke. The thought of his nightmare came to him and he wondered again at its vividness as he climbed down out of the tree. A near-by spring slaked his thirst and some fruit, rare in these highlands, eased his hunger.

Then he turned his face again to the hills. A finish fighter was Solomon Kane. Along that grim skyline dwelt some evil foe to the sons of men, and that mere fact was as much a challenge to the Puritan as had ever been a glove thrown in his face by some hot-headed gallant of Devon.

Refreshed by his night's sleep, he set out with his long easy stride, passing the grove that had witnessed the battle in the night, and coming into the region where the trees thinned at the foot of the slopes. Up these slopes he went, halting for a moment to gaze back over the way he had come. Now that he was above the plateau, he could easily make out a village in the distance—a cluster of mud-and-bamboo huts with one unusually large hut a short distance from the rest on a sort of low knoll.

And while he gazed, with a sudden rush of grisly wings the terror was upon him! Kane whirled, galvanized. All signs had pointed to the theory of a winged thing that hunted by night. He had not expected attack in broad daylight—but here a bat-like monster was swooping at him out of the very eye of the rising sun. Kane saw a spread of mighty wings, from which glared a horribly human face; then he drew and fired with unerring aim and the monster veered wildly in midair and came whirling and tumbling out of the sky to crash at his feet.

Kane leaned forward, pistol smoking in his hand, and gazed wide-eyed. Surely this thing was a demon out of the black pits of hell, said the somber mind of the Puritan; yet a leaden ball had slain it. Kane shrugged his shoulders, baffled; he had never seen aught to approach this, though all his life had fallen in strange ways.

The thing was like a man, inhumanly tall and inhumanly thin; the head was long, narrow and hairless—the head of a predatory creature. The ears were small, close-set and queerly pointed. The eyes, set in death, were narrow, oblique and of a strange yellowish color. The nose was thin and hooked, like the beak of a bird of prey, the mouth a wide cruel gash, whose thin lips, writhed in a death snarl and flecked with foam, disclosed wolfish fangs.

The creature, which was naked and hairless, was not unlike a human being in other ways. The shoulders were broad and powerful, the neck long and lean. The arms were long and muscular, the thumb being set beside the fingers after the manner of the great apes. Fingers and thumbs were armed with heavy hooked talons. The chest was curiously misshapen, the breastbone jutting out like the keel of a ship, the ribs curving back from it. The legs were long and wiry with huge, hand-like, prehensile feet, the great toe set opposite the rest like a man's thumb. The claws on the toes were merely long nails.

But the most curious feature of this curious creature was on its back. A pair of great wings, shaped much like the wings of a moth but with a bony frame and of leathery substance, grew from its shoulders, beginning at a point just back and above where the arms joined the shoulders, and extending half-way to the narrow hips. These wings, Kane reckoned, would measure some eighteen feet from tip to tip.

He laid hold on the creature, involuntarily shuddering at the slick, hard leather-like feel of the skin, and half lifted it. The weight was little more than half as much as it would have been in a man the same height—some six and a half feet. Evidently the bones were of a peculiar bird-like structure and the flesh consisted almost entirely of stringy muscles.

Kane stepped back, surveying the thing again. Then his dream had been no dream after all—that foul thing or another like it had in grisly reality lighted in the tree beside him—a whir of mighty wings! A sudden rush through the sky! Even as Kane whirled he realized he had committed the jungle-farer's unpardonable crime—he had allowed his astonishment and curiosity to throw him off guard. Already

a winged fiend was at his throat and there was no time to draw and fire his other pistol. Kane saw, in a maze of thrashing wings, a devilish, semi-human face—he felt those wings battering at him—he felt cruel talons sink deep into his breast; then he was dragged off his feet and felt empty space beneath him.

The winged man had wrapped his limbs about the Englishman's legs, and the talons he had driven into Kane's breast muscles held like fanged vises. The wolf-like fangs drove at Kane's throat but the Puritan gripped the bony throat and thrust back the grisly head, while with his right hand he strove to draw his dirk. The bird-man was mounting slowly and a fleeting glance showed Kane that they were already high above the trees. The Englishman did not hope to survive this battle in the sky, for even if he slew his foe, he would be dashed to death in the fall. But with the innate ferocity of the fighting Anglo-Saxon he set himself grimly to take his captor with him.

Holding those keen fangs at bay, Kane managed to draw his dirk and he plunged it deep into the body of the monster. The bat-man veered wildly and a rasping, raucous screech burst from his half-throttled throat. He floundered wildly, beating frantically with his great wings, bowing his back and twisting his head fiercely in a vain effort to free it and sink home his deadly fangs. He sank the talons of one hand agonizingly deeper and deeper into Kane's breast muscles, while with the other he tore at his foe's head and body. But the Englishman, gashed and bleeding, with the silent and tenacious savagery of a bulldog sank his fingers deeper into the lean neck and drove his dirk home again and again, while far below awed eyes watched the fiendish battle that was raging at that dizzy height.

They had drifted out over the plateau, and the fast-weakening wings of the bat-man barely supported their weight. They were sinking earthward swiftly, but Kane, blinded with blood and battle-fury, knew nothing of this. With a great piece of his scalp hanging loose, his chest and shoulders cut and ripped, the world had become a blind, red thing in which he was aware of but one sensation—the bulldog urge to kill his foe. Now the feeble and spasmodic beating of the dying monster's wings held them hovering for an instant above a thick grove of gigantic trees, while Kane felt the grip of claws and twining limbs grow weaker and the slashing of the talons become a futile flailing.

With a last burst of power he drove the reddened dirk straight through the breastbone and felt a convulsive tremor run through the creature's frame. The great wings fell limp—and victor and vanquished dropped headlong and plummet-like earthward.

Through a red wave Kane saw the waving branches rushing up to meet them—he felt them flail his face and tear at his clothing, as still locked in that death-clinch he rushed downward through leaves which eluded his vainly grasping hand; then his head crashed against a great limb and an endless abyss of blackness engulfed him.

3. The People in the Shadow

THROUGH colossal, black basaltic corridors of night, Solomon Kane fled for a thousand years. Gigantic winged demons, horrific in the utter darkness, swept over him with a rush of great bat-like pinions and in the blackness he fought with them as a cornered rat fights a vampire-bat, while fleshless jaws drooled fearful blasphemies and horrid secrets in his ears, and the skulls of men rolled under his groping feet.

Solomon Kane came back suddenly from the land of delirium and his first

sight of sanity was that of a fat, kindly black face bending over him. Kane saw he was in a roomy, clean and well-ventilated hut, while from a cooking-pot bubbling outside wafted savory scents. Kane realized he was ravenously hungry. And he was strangely weak, and the hand he lifted to his bandaged head shook and its bronze was dimmed.

The fat man and another, a tall, gaunt, grim-faced warrior, bent over him, and the fat man said: "He is awake, Kuroba, and of sound mind." The gaunt man nodded and called something which was answered from without.

"What is this place?" asked Kane, in a language he had learned, akin to the dialect the black had used. "How long have I lain here?"

"This is the last village of Bogonda." The fat black pressed him back with hands gentle as a woman's. "We found you lying beneath the trees on the slopes, badly wounded and senseless. You have raved in delirium for many days. Now eat."

A lithe young warrior entered with a wooden bowl full of steaming food and Kane ate ravenously.

"He is like a leopard, Kuroba," said the fat man admiringly. "Not one in a thousand would have lived with his wounds."

"Aye," returned the other. "And he slew the akaana that rent him, Goru."

Kane struggled to his elbows. "Goru?" he cried fiercely. "The priest who binds men to stakes for devils to eat?"

And he strove to rise so that he could strangle the fat man, but his weakness swept over him like a wave, the hut swam dizzily to his eyes and he sank back panting, where he soon fell into a sound, natural sleep.

Later he awoke and found a slim young girl, named Nayela, watching him. She fed him, and feeling much stronger, Kane asked questions which she answered shyly but intelligently. This was Bogonda, ruled by Kuroba the chief and Goru the priest. None in Bogonda had ever seen or heard of a white man before. She counted the days Kane had lain helpless, and he was amazed. But such a battle as he had been through was enough to kill an ordinary man. He wondered that no bones had been broken, but the girl said the branches had broken his fall and he had landed on the body of the akaana. He asked for Goru, and the fat priest came to him, bringing Kane's weapons.

"Some we found with you where you lay," said Goru, "some by the body of the akaana you slew with the weapon which speaks in fire and smoke. You must be a god—yet the gods bleed not and you have just all but died. Who are you?"

"I am no god," Kane answered, "but a man like yourself, albeit my skin be white. I come from a far land amid the sea, which land, mind ye, is the fairest and noblest of all lands. My name is Solomon Kane and I am a landless wanderer. From the lips of a dying man I first heard your name. Yet your face seemeth kindly."

A shadow crossed the eyes of the shaman and he hung his head.

"Rest and grow strong, oh man, or god or whatever you be," said he, "and in time you will learn of the ancient curse that rests upon this ancient land."

And in the days that followed, while Kane recovered and grew strong with the wild beast vitality that was his, Goru and Kuroba sat and spoke to him at length, telling him many curious things.

Their tribe was not aboriginal here, but had come upon the plateau a hundred and fifty years before, giving it the name of their former home. They had once been a powerful tribe in Old Bogonda, on a great river far to the south. But tribal wars broke their power, and at last before

a concerted uprising, the whole tribe gave way, and Goru repeated legends of that great flight of a thousand miles through jungle and swampland harried at every step by cruel foes.

At last, hacking their way through a country of ferocious cannibals, they found themselves safe from man's attack—but prisoners in a trap from which neither they nor their descendants could ever escape. They were in the horror-country of Akaana, and Goru said his ancestors came to understand the jeering laughter of the man-eaters who had hounded them to the very borders of the plateau.

The Bogondi found a fertile country with good water and plenty of game. There were numbers of goats and a species of wild pig that throve here in great abundance. At first the black people ate these pigs, but later they spared them for a very good reason. The grasslands between plateau and jungle swarmed with antelopes, buffaloes and the like, and there were many lions. Lions also roamed the plateau, but Bogonda meant "Lion-slayer" in their tongue and it was not many moons before the remnants of the great cats took to the lower levels. But it was not lions they had to fear, as Goru's ancestors soon learned.

Finding that the cannibals would not come past the savannas, they rested from their long trek and built two villages—Upper and Lower Bogonda. Kane was in Upper Bogonda; he had seen the ruins of the lower village. But soon they found that they had strayed into a country of nightmares with dripping fangs and talons. They heard the beat of mighty wings at night, and saw horrific shadows cross the stars and loom against the moon. Children began to disappear and at last a young hunter strayed off into the hills, where night overtook him. And in the gray light of dawn a mangled, half-devoured corpse fell from the skies into the village street and a whisper of ogreish laughter from high above froze the horrified onlookers. Then a little later the full horror of their position burst upon the Bogondi.

At first the winged men were afraid of the black people. They hid themselves and ventured from their caverns only at night. Then they grew bolder. In the full daylight, a warrior shot one with an arrow, but the fiends had learned they could slay a human and its death scream brought a score of the devils dropping from the skies, who tore the slayer to pieces in full sight of the tribe.

The Bogondi then prepared to leave that devil's country and a hundred warriors went up into the hills to find a pass. They found steep walls, up which a man must climb laboriously, and they found the cliffs honeycombed with caves where the winged men dwelt.

Then was fought the first pitched battle between men and bat-men and it resulted in a crushing victory for the monsters. The bows and spears of the black people proved futile before the swoops of the taloned fiends, and of all that hundred that went up into the hills, not one survived; for the akaanas hunted down those that fled and dragged down the last one within bowshot of the upper village.

Then it was that the Bogondi, seeing they could not hope to win through the hills, sought to fight their way out again the way they had come. But a great horde of cannibals met them in the grasslands and in a great battle that lasted nearly all day, hurled them back, broken and defeated. And Goru said while the battle raged, the skies were thronged with hideous shapes, circling above and laughing their fearful mirth to see men die wholesale.

So the survivors of those two battles, licking their wounds, bowed to the inevitable with the fatalistic philosophy of the

black man. Some fifteen hundred men, women and children remained, and they built their huts, tilled the soil and lived stolidly in the shadow of the nightmare.

In those days there were many of the bird-people, and they might have wiped out the Bogondi utterly, had they wished. No one warrior could cope with an akaana, for he was stronger than a human, he struck as a hawk strikes, and if he missed, his wings carried him out of reach of a counter-blow. Here Kane interrupted to ask why the blacks did not make war on the demons with arrows. But Goru answered that it took a quick and accurate archer to strike an akaana in midair at all and so tough were their hides that unless the arrow struck squarely it would not penetrate. Kane knew that the blacks were very indifferent bowmen and that they pointed their shafts with chipped stone, bone or hammered iron almost as soft as copper; he thought of Poitiers and Agincourt and wished grimly for a file of stout English archers—or a rank of musketeers.

But Goru said the akaanas did not seem to wish to destroy the Bogondi utterly. Their chief food consisted of the little pigs which then swarmed the plateau, and young goats. Sometimes they went out on the savannas for antelope, but they distrusted the open country and feared the lions. Nor did they haunt the jungles beyond, for the trees grew too close for the spread of their wings. They kept to the hills and the plateau—and what lay beyond those hills none in Bogonda knew.

The akaanas allowed the black folk to inhabit the plateau much as men allow wild animals to thrive, or stock lakes with fish—for their own pleasure. The bat-people, said Goru, had a strange and grisly sense of humor which was tickled by the sufferings of a howling human. Those grim hills had echoed to cries that turned men's hearts to ice.

But for many years, Goru said, once the Bogondi learned not to resist their masters, the akaanas were content to snatch up a baby from time to time, or devour a young girl strayed from the village or a youth whom night caught outside the walls. The bat-folk distrusted the village; they circled high above it but did not venture within. There the Bogondi were safe until late years.

Goru said that the akaanas were fast dying out; once there had been hope that the remnants of his race would outlast them—in which event, he said fatalistically, the cannibals would undoubtedly come up from the jungle and put the survivors in the cooking-pots. Now he doubted if there were more than a hundred and fifty akaanas altogether. Kane asked him why did not the warriors then sally forth on a great hunt and destroy the devils utterly, and Goru smiled a bitter smile and repeated his remarks about the prowess of the bat-people in battle. Moreover, said he, the whole tribe of Bogonda numbered only about four hundred souls now, and the bat-people were their only protection against the cannibals to the west.

Goru said the tribe had thinned more in the past thirty years than in all the years previous. As the numbers of the akaanas dwindled, their hellish savagery increased. They seized more and more of the Bogondi to torture and devour in their grim black caves high up in the hills, and Goru spoke of sudden raids on hunting-parties and toilers in the plantain fields and of the nights made ghastly by horrible screams and gibberings from the dark hills, and blood-freezing laughter that was half human; of dismembered limbs and gory grinning heads flung from the skies to fall in the shuddering village, and of grisly feasts among the stars.

Then came drouth, Goru said, and a great famine. Many of the springs dried up and the crops of rice and yams and plantains failed. The gnus, deer and buf-

faloes which had formed the main part of Bogonda's meat diet withdrew to the jungle in quest of water, and the lions, their hunger overcoming their fear of man, ranged into the uplands. Many of the tribe died and the rest were driven by hunger to eat the pigs which were the natural prey of the bat-people. This angered the akaanas and thinned the pigs. Famine, Bogondi and the lions destroyed all the goats and half the pigs.

At last the famine was past, but the damage was done. Of all the great droves which once swarmed the plateau, only a remnant was left and these were wary and hard to catch. The Bogondi had eaten the pigs, so the akaanas ate the Bogondi. Life became a hell for the black people, and the lower village, numbering now only some hundred and fifty souls, rose in revolt. Driven to frenzy by repeated outrages, they turned on their masters. An akaana lighting in the very streets to steal a child was set on and shot to death with arrows. And the people of Lower Bogonda drew into their huts and waited for their doom.

And in the night, said Goru, it came. The akaanas had overcome their distrust of the huts. The full flock of them swarmed down from the hills, and Upper Bogonda awoke to hear the fearful cataclysm of screams and blasphemies that marked the end of the other village. All night Goru's people had lain sweating in terror, not daring to move, harkening to the howling and gibbering that rent the night; at last these sounds ceased, Goru said, wiping the cold sweat from his brow, but sounds of grisly and obscene feasting still haunted the night with demon's mockery.

In the early dawn Goru's people saw the hell-flock winging back to their hills, like demons flying back to hell through the dawn, and they flew slowly and heavily, like gorged vultures. Later the people dared to steal down to the accursed village, and what they found there sent them shrieking away; and to that day, Goru said, no man passed within three bowshots of that silent horror. And Kane nodded in understanding, his cold eyes more somber than ever.

For many days after that, Goru said, the people waited in quaking fear, and finally in desperation of fear, which breeds unspeakable cruelty, the tribe cast lots and the loser was bound to a stake between the two villages, in hopes the akaanas would recognize this as a token of submission so that the people of Bogonda might escape the fate of their kinsmen. This custom, said Goru, had been borrowed from the cannibals who in old times worshipped the akaanas and offered a human sacrifice at each moon. But chance had shown them that the akaana could be killed, so they ceased to worship him—at least that was Goru's deduction, and he explained at much length that no mortal thing is worthy of real adoration, however evil or powerful it may be.

His own ancestors had made occasional sacrifices to placate the winged devils, but until lately it had not been a regular custom. Now it was necessary; the akaanas expected it, and each moon they chose from their waning numbers a strong young man or a girl whom they bound to the stake. Kane watched Goru's face closely as he spoke of his sorrow for this unspeakable necessity, and the Englishman realized the priest was sincere. Kane shuddered at the thought of a tribe of human beings thus passing slowly but surely into the maws of a race of monsters.

Kane spoke of the wretch he had seen, and Goru nodded, pain in his soft eyes. For a day and a night he had been hanging there, while the akaanas glutted their vile torture-lust on his quivering, agonized flesh. Thus far the sacrifices had kept

doom from the village. The remaining pigs furnished sustenance for the dwindling akaanas, together with an occasional baby snatched up, and they were content to have their nameless sport with the single victim each moon.

A thought came to Kane.

"The cannibals never come up into the plateau?"

Goru shook his head; safe in their jungle, they never raided past the savannas.

"But they hunted me to the very foot of the hills."

Again Goru shook his head. There was only one cannibal; they had found his footprints. Evidently a single warrior, bolder than the rest, had allowed his passion for the chase to overcome his fear of the grisly plateau and had paid the penalty. Kane's teeth came together with a vicious snap which ordinarily took the place of profanity with him. He was stung by the thought of fleeing so long from a single enemy. No wonder that enemy had followed so cautiously, waiting until dark to attack. But, asked Kane, why had the akaana seized the black man instead of himself—and why had he not been attacked by the bat-man who alighted in his tree that night?

The cannibal was bleeding, Goru answered; the scent called the bat-fiend to attack, for they scented raw blood as far as vultures. And they were very wary. They had never seen a man like Kane, who showed no fear. Surely they had decided to spy on him, take him off guard before they struck.

Who were these creatures? Kane asked. Goru shrugged his shoulders. They were there when his ancestors came, who had never heard of them before they saw them. There was no intercourse with the cannibals, so they could learn nothing from them. The akaanas lived in caves, naked like beasts; they knew nothing of fire and ate only fresh raw meat. But they had a language of a sort and acknowledged a king among them. Many died in the great famine when the stronger ate the weaker. They were vanishing swiftly; of late years no females or young had been observed among them. When these males died at last, there would be no more akaanas; but Bogonda, observed Goru, was doomed already, unless—he looked strangely and wistfully at Kane. But the Puritan was deep in thought.

Among the swarm of native legends he had heard on his wanderings, one now stood out. Long, long ago, an old, old ju-ju man had told him, winged devils came flying out of the north and passed over his country, vanishing in the maze of the jungle-haunted south. And the ju-ju man related an old, old legend concerning these creatures—that once they had abode in myriad numbers far on a great lake of bitter water many moons to the north, and ages and ages ago a chieftain and his warriors fought them with bows and arrows and slew many, driving the rest into the south. The name of the chief was N'Yasunna and he owned a great war canoe with many oars driving it swiftly through the bitter water.

And now a cold wind blew suddenly on Solomon Kane, as if from a Door opened suddenly on Outer gulfs of Time and Space. For now he realized the truth of that garbled myth, and the truth of an older, grimmer legend. For what was the great bitter lake but the Mediterranean Ocean and who was the chief N'Yasunna but the hero Jason, who conquered the harpies and drove them—not alone into the Strophades Isles but into Africa as well? The old pagan tale was true then, Kane thought dizzily, shrinking aghast from the strange realm of grisly possibilities this opened up. For if this myth of the harpies were a reality, what of the other legends—the Hydra, the centaurs, the chimera, Medusa, Pan and the satyrs?

All those myths of antiquity—behind them did there lie and lurk nightmare realities with slavering fangs and talons steeped in shuddersome evil? Africa, the Dark Continent, land of shadows and horror, of bewitchment and sorcery, into which all evil things had been banished before the growing light of the western world!

Kane came out of his reveries with a start. Goru was tugging gently and timidly at his sleeve.

"Save us from the akaanas!" said Goru. "If you be not a god, there is the power of a god in you! You bear in your hand the mighty ju-ju stave which has in times gone by been the scepter of fallen empires and the staff of mighty priests. And you have weapons which speak death in fire and smoke—for our young men watched and saw you slay two akaanas. We will make you king—god—what you will! More than a moon has passed since you came into Bogonda and the time for the sacrifice is gone by, but the bloody stake stands bare. The akaanas shun the village where you lie; they steal no more babes from us. We have thrown off their yoke because our trust is in you!"

Kane clasped his temples with his hands. "You know not what you ask!" he cried. "God knoweth it is in my deepest heart to rid the land of this evil, but I am no god. With my pistols I can slay a few of the fiends, but I have but a little powder left. Had I great store of powder and ball, and the musket I shattered in the vampire-haunted Hills of the Dead, then indeed would there be a rare hunting. But even if I slew all these fiends, what of the cannibals?"

"They too will fear you!" cried old Kuroba, while the girl Nayela and the lad, Loga, who was to have been the next sacrifice, gazed at him with their souls in their eyes. Kane dropped his chin on his fist and sighed.

"Yet will I stay here in Bogonda all the rest of my life if ye think I be protection to the people."

So Solomon Kane stayed at the village of Bogonda of the Shadow. The people were a kindly folk, whose natural sprightliness and fun-loving spirits were subdued and saddened by long dwelling in the Shadow. But now they had taken new heart by the white man's coming and it wrenched Kane's heart to note the pathetic trust they placed in him. Now they sang in the plantain fields and danced about the fires, and gazed at him with adoring faith in their eyes. But Kane, cursing his own helplessness, knew how futile would be his fancied protection if the winged fiends swept suddenly out of the skies.

But he stayed in Bogonda. In his dreams the gulls wheeled above the cliffs of old Devon carved in the clean, blue, wind-whipped skies, and in the day the call of the unknown lands beyond Bogonda clawed at his heart with fierce yearning. But he abode in Bogonda and racked his brains for a plan. He sat and gazed for hours at the ju-ju stave, hoping in desperation that black magic would aid him, where the white man's mind failed. But N'Longa's ancient gift gave him no aid. Once he had summoned the Slave Coast shaman to him across leagues of intervening space—but it was only when confronted with supernatural manifestations that N'Longa could come to him, and these harpies were not supernatural.

The germ of an idea began to grow at the back of Kane's mind, but he discarded it. It had to do with a great trap—and how could the akaanas be trapped? The roaring of lions played a grim accompaniment to his brooding meditations. As man dwindled on the plateau, the hunting beasts who feared only the spears of the hunters were beginning to gather. Kane laughed bitterly. It was not lions, that

might be hunted down and slain singly, that he had to deal with.

At some little distance from the village stood the great hut of Goru, once a council hall. This hut was full of many strange fetishes, which Goru said with a helpless wave of his fat hands, were strong magic against evil spirits but scant protection against winged hellions of gristle and bone and flesh.

4. *The Madness of Solomon*

KANE woke suddenly from a dreamless sleep. A hideous medley of screams burst horrific in his ears. Outside his hut, people were dying in the night, horribly, as cattle die in the shambles. He had slept, as always, with his weapons buckled on him. Now he bounded to the door, and something fell mouthing and slavering at his feet to grasp his knees in a convulsive grip and gibber incoherent pleas. In the faint light of a smoldering fire near by, Kane in horror recognized the face of the youth Loga, now frightfully torn and drenched in blood, already freezing into a death mask. The night was full of fearful sounds, inhuman howlings mingled with the whisper of mighty wings, the tearing of thatch and a ghastly demon-laughter. Kane freed himself from the locked dead arms and sprang to the dying fire. He could make out only a confused and vague maze of fleeing forms, and darting shapes, the shift and blur of dark wings against the stars.

He snatched up a brand and thrust it against the thatch of his hut—and as the flame leaped up and showed him the scene he stood frozen and aghast. Red, howling doom had fallen on Bogonda. Winged monsters raced screaming through her streets, wheeled above the heads of the fleeing people, or tore apart the hut thatches to get at the gibbering victims within.

With a choked cry the Englishman woke from his trance of horror, drew and fired at a darting flame-eyed shadow which fell at his feet with a shattered skull. And Kane gave tongue to one deep, fierce roar and bounded into the mêlée, all the berserk fury of his heathen Saxon ancestors bursting into terrible being.

Dazed and bewildered by the sudden attack, cowed by long years of submission, the Bogondi were incapable of combined resistance and for the most part died like sheep. Some, maddened by desperation, fought back, but their arrows went wild or glanced from the tough wings while the devilish agility of the creatures made spear-thrust and ax-stroke uncertain. Leaping from the ground they avoided the blows of their victims and sweeping down upon their shoulders dashed them to earth, where fang and talon did their crimson work.

Kane saw old Kuroba, gaunt and blood-stained, at bay against a hut wall with his foot on the neck of a monster who had not been quick enough. The grim-faced old chief wielded a two-handed ax in great sweeping blows that for the moment held back the screeching onset of half a dozen of the devils. Kane was leaping to his aid when a low, pitiful whimper checked him. The girl Nayela writhed weakly, prone in the bloody dust, while on her back a vulture-like thing crouched and tore. Her dulling eyes sought the face of the Englishman in anguished appeal. Kane ripped out a bitter oath and fired point-blank. The winged devil pitched backward with an abhorrent screeching and a wild flutter of dying wings and Kane bent to the dying girl, who whimpered and kissed his hands with uncertain lips as he cradled her head in his arms. Her eyes set.

Kane laid the body gently down, looking for Kuroba. He saw only a huddled cluster of grisly shapes that sucked and tore at something between them. And

Kane went mad. With a scream that cut through the inferno he bounded up, slaying even as he rose. Even in the act of lunging up from bent knee he drew and thrust, transfixing a vulture-like throat. Then whipping out his rapier as the thing floundered and twitched in its death struggles, the raging Puritan charged forward seeking new victims.

On all sides of him the people of Bogonda were dying hideously. They fought futilely or they fled and the demons coursed them down as a hawk courses a hare. They ran into the huts and the fiends rent the thatch or burst the door, and what took place in those huts was mercifully hidden from Kane's eyes. And to the frantic white man's horror-distorted brain it seemed that he alone was responsible. The black folk had trusted him to save them. They had withheld the sacrifice and defied their grim masters and now they were paying the horrible penalty and he was unable to save them. In the agony-dimmed eyes turned toward him Kane quaffed the black dregs of the bitter cup. It was not anger or the vindictiveness of fear. It was hurt and a stunned reproach. He was their god and he had failed them.

Now he ravened through the massacre and the fiends avoided him, turning to the easy black victims. But Kane was not to be denied. In a red haze that was not of the burning hut, he saw a culminating horror; a harpy gripped a writhing naked thing that had been a woman and the wolfish fangs gorged deep. As Kane sprang, thrusting, the bat-man dropped his yammering, mowing prey and soared aloft. But Kane dropped his rapier and with the bound of a blood-mad panther caught the demon's throat and locked his iron legs about its lower body.

Again he found himself battling in midair, but this time only above the roofs of the huts. Terror had entered the cold brain of the harpy. He did not fight to hold and slay; he wished only to be rid of this silent, clinging thing that stabbed so savagely for his life. He floundered wildly, screaming abhorrently and thrashing with his wings, then as Kane's dirk bit deeper, dipped suddenly sidewise and fell headlong.

The thatch of a hut broke their fall, and Kane and the dying harpy crashed through to land on a writhing mass on the hut floor. In the lurid flickering of the burning hut outside, that vaguely lighted the hut into which he had fallen, Kane saw a deed of brain-shaking horror being enacted—red dripping fangs in a yawning gash of a mouth, and a crimson travesty of a human form that still writhed with agonized life. Then in the maze of madness that held him, his steel fingers closed on the fiend's throat in a grip that no tearing of talons or hammering of wings could loosen, until he felt the horrid life flow out from under his fingers and the bony neck hung broken.

And still outside the red madness of slaughter continued. Kane bounded up, his hand closing blindly on the haft of some weapon, and as he leaped from the hut a harpy soared from under his very feet. It was an ax that Kane had snatched up, and he dealt a stroke that spattered the demon's brains like water. He sprang forward, stumbling over bodies and parts of bodies, blood streaming from a dozen wounds, and then halted baffled and screaming with rage.

The bat-people were taking to the air. No longer would they face this white-skinned madman who in his insanity was more terrible than they. But they went not alone into the upper regions. In their lustful talons they bore writhing, screaming forms, and Kane, raging to and fro with his dripping ax, found himself alone in a corpse-choked village.

He threw back his head to shriek his

hate at the fiends above him and he felt warm, thick drops fall into his face, while the shadowy skies were filled with screams of agony and the laughter of monsters. And Kane's last vestige of reason snapped as the sounds of that ghastly feast in the skies filled the night and the blood that rained from the stars fell into his face. He gibbered to and fro, screaming chaotic blasphemies.

And was he not a symbol of Man, staggering among the tooth-marked bones and severed grinning heads of humans, brandishing a futile ax, and screaming incoherent hate at the grisly, winged shapes of Night that make him their prey, chuckling in demoniac triumph above him and dripping into his mad eyes the pitiful blood of their human victims?

5. *The White-skinned Conqueror*

A SHUDDERING, white-faced dawn crept over the black hills to shiver above the red shambles that had been the village of Bogonda. The huts stood intact, except for the one which had sunk to smoldering coals, but the thatches of many were torn. Dismembered bones, half or wholly stripped of flesh, lay in the streets, and some were splintered as though they had been dropped from a great height.

It was a realm of the dead where was but one sign of life. Solomon Kane leaned on his blood-clotted ax and gazed upon the scene with dull, mad eyes. He was grimed and clotted with half-dried blood from long gashes on chest, face and shoulders, but he paid no heed to his hurts.

The people of Bogonda had not died alone. Seventeen harpies lay among the bones. Six of these Kane had slain. The rest had fallen before the frantic dying desperation of the black people. But it was poor toll to take in return. Of the four hundred odd people of Upper Bogonda, not one had lived to see the dawn.

And the harpies were gone—back to their caves in the black hills, gorged to repletion.

With slow, mechanical steps Kane went about gathering up his weapons. He found his sword, dirk, pistols and the juju stave. He left the main village and went up the slope to the great hut of Goru. And there he halted, stung by a new horror. The ghastly humor of the harpies had prompted a delicious jest. Above the hut door stared the severed head of Goru. The fat cheeks were shrunken, the lips lolled in an aspect of horrified idiocy, and the eyes stared like a hurt child. And in those dead eyes Kane saw wonder and reproach.

Kane looked at the shambles that had been Bogonda, and he looked at the death mask of Goru. And he lifted his clenched fists above his head, and with glaring eyes raised and writhing lips flecked with froth, he cursed the sky and the earth and the spheres above and below. He cursed the cold stars, the blazing sun, the mocking moon and the whisper of the wind. He cursed all fates and destinies, all that he had loved or hated, the silent cities beneath the seas, the past ages and the future eons. In one soul-shaking burst of blasphemy he cursed the gods and devils who make mankind their sport, and he cursed Man who lives blindly on and blindly offers his back to the iron-hoofed feet of his gods.

Then as breath failed he halted, panting. From the lower reaches sounded the deep roaring of a lion and into the eyes of Solomon Kane came a crafty gleam. He stood long, as one frozen, and out of his madness grew a desperate plan. And he silently recanted his blasphemy, for if the brazen-hoofed gods made Man for their sport and plaything, they also gave him a brain that holds craft and cruelty greater than any other living thing.

"There you shall bide," said Solomon Kane to the head of Goru. "The sun will wither you and the cold dews of night will shrivel you. But I will keep the kites from you and your eyes shall see the fall of your slayers. Aye, I could not save the people of Bogonda, but by the God of my race, I can avenge them. Man is the sport and sustenance of titanic beings of Night and Horror whose giant wings hover ever above him. But even evil things may come to an end—and watch ye, Goru."

In the days that followed Kane labored mightily, beginning with the first gray light of dawn and toiling on past sunset, into the white moonlight till he fell and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. He snatched food as he worked and he gave his wounds absolutely no heed, scarcely being aware that they healed of themselves. He went down into the lower levels and cut bamboo, great stacks of long, tough stalks. He cut thick branches of trees, and tough vines to serve as ropes. And with this material he reinforced the walls and roof of Goru's hut. He set the bamboos deep in the earth, hard against the wall, and interwove and twined them, binding them fast with the vines that were pliant and tough as cords. The long branches he made fast along the thatch, binding them close together. When he had finished, an elephant could scarcely have burst through the walls.

The lions had come into the plateau in great quantities and the herds of little pigs dwindled fast. Those the lions spared, Kane slew, and tossed to the jackals. This racked Kane's heart, for he was a kindly man and this wholesale slaughter, even of pigs who would fall prey to hunting beasts anyhow, grieved him. But it was part of his plan of vengeance and he steeled his heart.

The days stretched into weeks. Kane toiled by day and by night, and between his stints he talked to the shriveled, mummied head of Goru, whose eyes, strangely enough, did not change in the blaze of the sun or the haunt of the moon, but retained their life-like expression. When the memory of those lunacy-haunted days had become only a vague nightmare, Kane wondered if, as it had seemed to him, Goru's dried lips had moved in answer, speaking strange and mysterious things.

Kane saw the akaanas wheeling against the sky at a distance, but they did not come near, even when he slept in the great hut, pistols at hand. They feared his power to deal death with smoke and thunder. At first he noted that they flew sluggishly, gorged with the flesh they had eaten on that red night, and the bodies they had borne to their caves. But as the weeks passed they appeared leaner and leaner and ranged far afield in search of food. And Kane laughed, deeply and madly. This plan of his would never have worked before, but now there were no humans to fill the bellies of the harpy-folk. And there were no more pigs. In all the plateau there were no creatures for the bat-people to eat. Why they did not range east of the hills, Kane thought he knew. That must be a region of thick jungle like the country to the west. He saw them fly into the grassland for antelopes and he saw the lions take toll of them. After all, the akaanas were weak beings among the hunters, strong enough only to slay pigs and deer—and humans.

At last they began to soar close to him at night and he saw their greedy eyes glaring at him through the gloom. He judged the time was ripe. Huge buffaloes, too big and ferocious for the bat-people to slay, had strayed up into the plateau to ravage the deserted fields of the dead black people. Kane cut one of these out of the herd and drove him, with shouts and volleys of stones, to the hut of Goru. It was a tedious, dangerous task, and time

and again Kane barely escaped the surly bull's sudden charges, but persevered and at last shot the beast before the hut.

A strong west wind was blowing and Kane flung handfuls of blood into the air for the scent to waft to the harpies in the hills. He cut the bull to pieces and carried its quarters into the hut, then managed to drag the huge trunk itself inside. Then he retired into the thick trees near by and waited.

He had not long to wait. The morning air filled suddenly with the beat of many wings and a hideous flock alighted before the hut of Goru. All of the beasts—or men—seemed to be there, and Kane gazed in wonder at the tall, strange creatures, so like to humanity and yet so unlike—the veritable demons of priestly legend. They folded their wings like cloaks about them as they walked upright and they talked to one another in a strident crackling voice that had nothing of the human in it. No, these things were not men, Kane decided. They were the materialization of some ghastly jest of Nature—some travesty of the world's infancy when Creation was an experiment. Perhaps they were the offspring of a forbidden and obscene mating of man and beast; more likely they were a freakish offshoot on the branch of evolution—for Kane had long ago dimly sensed a truth in the heretical theories of the ancient philosophers, that Man is but a higher beast. And if Nature made many strange beasts in the past ages, why should she not have experimented with monstrous forms of mankind? Surely Man as Kane knew him was not the first of his breed to walk the earth, nor yet to be the last.

Now the harpies hesitated, with their natural distrust for a building, and some soared to the roof and tore at the thatch. But Kane had builded well. They returned to earth and at last, driven beyond endurance by the smell of raw blood and the sight of the flesh within, one of them ventured inside. In an instant all were crowded into the great hut, tearing ravenously at the meat, and when the last one was within, Kane reached out a hand and jerked a long vine which tripped the catch that held the door he had built. It fell with a crash and the bar he had fashioned dropped into place. That door would hold against the charge of a wild bull.

Kane came from his covert and scanned the sky. Some hundred and forty harpies had entered the hut. He saw no more winging through the skies, and believed it safe to suppose he had the whole flock trapped. Then with a cruel, brooding smile, Kane struck flint and steel to a pile of dead leaves next the wall. Within sounded an uneasy mumbling as the creatures realized that they were prisoners. A thin wisp of smoke curled upward and a flicker of red followed it; the whole heap burst into flame and the dry bamboo caught.

A few moments later the whole side of the wall was ablaze. The fiends inside scented the smoke and grew restless. Kane heard them cackling wildly and clawing at the walls. He grinned savagely, bleakly and without mirth. Now a veer of the wind drove the flames around the wall and up over the thatch—with a roar the whole hut caught and leaped into flame. From within sounded a fearful pandemonium. Kane heard bodies crash against the walls, which shook to the impact but held. The horrid screams were music to his soul, and brandishing his arms, he answered them with screams of fearful, soul-shaking laughter. The cataclysm of horror rose unbearably, paling the tumult of the flames. Then it dwindled to a medley of strangled gibbering and gasps as the flames ate in and the smoke thickened. An intolerable scent of

burning flesh pervaded the atmosphere, and had there been room in Kane's brain for aught else than insane triumph, he would have shuddered to realize that the scent was of that nauseating and indescribable odor that only human flesh emits when burning.

From the thick cloud of smoke Kane saw a mowing, gibbering thing emerge through the shredding roof and flap slowly and agonizingly upward on fearfully burned wings. Calmly he aimed and fired, and the scorched and blinded thing tumbled back into the flaming mass just as the walls crashed in. To Kane it seemed that Goru's crumbling face, vanishing in the smoke, split suddenly in a wide grin and a sudden shout of exultant human laughter mingled eerily in the roar of the flames. But the smoke and an insane brain plays queer tricks.

KANE stood with the ju-ju stave in one hand and the smoking pistol in the other, above the smoldering ruins that hid forever from the sight of man the last of those terrible, semi-human monsters whom another white-skinned hero had banished from Europe in an unknown age. Kane stood, an unconscious statue of triumph—the ancient empires fall, the dark-skinned peoples fade and even the demons of antiquity gasp their last, but over all stands the Aryan barbarian, white-skinned, cold-eyed, dominant, the supreme fighting man of the earth, whether he be clad in wolf-hide and horned helmet, or boots and doublet—whether he bear in his hand battle-ax or rapier—whether he be called Dorian, Saxon or Englishman—whether his name be Jason, Hengist or Solomon Kane.

Kane stood and the smoke curled upward into the morning sky, the roaring of foraging lions shook the plateau, and slowly, like light breaking through mists, sanity returned to him.

"The light of God's morning enters even into dark and lonesome lands," said Solomon Kane somberly. "Evil rules in the waste lands of the earth, but even evil may come to an end. Dawn follows midnight and even in this lost land the shadows shrink. Strange are Thy ways, oh God of my people, and who am I to question Thy wisdom? My feet have fallen in evil ways but Thou hast brought me forth scatheless and hast made me a scourge for the Powers of Evil. Over the souls of men spread the condor wings of colossal monsters and all manner of evil things prey upon the heart and soul and body of Man. Yet it may be in some far day the shadows shall fade and the Prince of Darkness be chained forever in his hell. And till then mankind can but stand up stoutly to the monsters in his own heart and without, and with the aid of God he may yet triumph."

And Solomon Kane looked up into the silent hills and felt the silent call of the hills and the unguessed distances beyond; and Solomon Kane shifted his belt, took his staff firmly in his hand and turned his face eastward.

"A flash of purple flame leapt from the mechanism, and the thud of a mighty concussion smote my ears."

The Planet of Peace

By ARLTON EADIE

The strange story of a man from Earth on a planet which was inhabited solely by women

TELL a man that there is a region, a bare fifty miles from London's teeming millions, where it is possible to tramp from dawn to dusk of a long summer day without coming face to face with a single human being, and if your hearer refuses to credit the statement you may be sure that he doesn't know the great Chalk Downs of Sussex.

From Petersfield on the west to Beachy Head on the east, a distance of more than seventy miles, the skyline of these vast

rolling uplands is unbroken by human habitation of any kind; for even the smallest farmhouse requires a supply of water, and this huge escarpment, reared like a rampart between the lower lands bordering the sea, and the plain of the Weald, has been carved by nature's chisel from one massive block of chalk as dry as the proverbial bone. There are no springs; wells would need to be sunk fully eight hundred feet before they reached even the surface of the plain below. Such villages and scattered farmsteads as exist nestle amid the foothills, near the streams, leaving the summits to the gulls and curlews, and—in the case of one lofty crest—to me.

I had taken up my residence in a house that had evidently been built by some optimist who was a stranger to the district. Situated but a score of yards below the windswept ridge, its windows commanded a view that was superb.

But the water supply was, in sober, literal truth, prehistoric. It consisted of a "dew-pond" or "dew-pan" such as the ancient Britons used to slake their thirsts ages before Cæsar's legions first sighted the white cliffs of Albion. It was simply a large, shallow, circular depression scooped in the chalk. In theory it was supposed to collect all the rain, dew and other moisture that might be in the air. In actual practise it collected other things as well. Any naturalist interested in pond-life would have been delighted with a glassful of that water before it had been boiled and filtered.

I had come to the Downs in search of solitude and inspiration for a novel that I contemplated writing. I got the solitude all right. It was five miles by the shortest practicable path to the nearest village, though only about three as the crow flies; and, save for an obviously new bungalow at the end of the straggling High Street and the tip of the church spire, the village lay as if it were shrinking coyly out of sight behind a fold in the lower slopes.

When the first novelty of my Crusoe-like existence had worn off I began to take a great interest in that little bungalow. I had a pair of very excellent field-glasses that had once formed part of the equipment of a German infantry officer (now deceased), and by their aid I was able to get a mild form of diversion by observing the activities of a man who sat for the greater part of the day at a kind of work-table set in the bay window.

His appearance was such as might have attracted notice even in a crowd. His figure was short and inclined to stoutness—decidedly not the type of figure that is seen to its best advantage when attired in a pair of very baggy "plus-fours" and a woolen "pull-over" bearing a startling thunder-and-lightning pattern in red and green on a cinnamon-brown ground. Yet that was the fashion of his raiment, and never subsequently did I see him dressed otherwise.

His features were more difficult to make out at that distance; but I could see that he was clean-shaven, with a large, pale face surmounted by the shining dome of a head entirely bald except for a fringe of black hair which began and ended about level with his ears.

The windows of the bungalow were destitute of curtains, and from my post of vantage I could see a segment of the room in which he was accustomed to work. It appeared to be a kind of compromise between a chemical laboratory and an optical instrument-maker's workshop. Ranged on shelves against the one wall visible to me were enough bottles to stock a chemist's shop; a lathe stood near the center of the room; a large vise was clamped to the bench in the window; and the bench itself was usually littered with a bewildering assortment of brass tubes, wheels, levers and

other pieces of mechanism. But, try as I might, I could not divine the nature of the machine that he was constructing. But I was soon enlightened on that point in a startlingly dramatic manner.

TOWARD sundown one evening, while waiting for the "inspiration" that stubbornly refused to materialize, I idly took up the glasses and focused them on my unknown distant friend. At the first glance it was apparent that he was as interested in me as I was in him. But his curiosity had gone to greater lengths—literally as well as figuratively—for he had his eyes glued to what looked like a large brass telescope pointing straight in my direction.

For a moment I felt rather rattled at being caught snooping; but, realizing that he could probably see me better than I could see him, I did not lower the field-glasses until I had carelessly swept my gaze round the landscape and stared for a good minute at the faint, blue-gray rim of the distant sea. Having, I hoped, thus given the impression that I was merely engaged in admiring the beauties of nature, I laid down the glasses, lighted a cigarette with as detached an air as I could assume, and again waited for my "inspiration."

Something else came instead.

Into my thoughts there obtruded the sound of a faint, deep-toned humming note; a chair behind me was suddenly and violently overturned, and a voice, apparently charged with the explosive force of intense exasperation, uttered one low but unmistakable word:

"Damn!"

I started to my feet and swung round. With a shock of stupefied amazement I saw, standing less than a yard from me, the figure of the little bald-headed man whom I had seen five minutes since sitting at the window of the distant bungalow!

There could be not the slightest doubt as to his identity. He wore the same baggy plus-fours, the same outrageous pull-over with the red-and-green design; he had the same high, bald head; the same fat, pallid features—which, I noticed, now bore an expression of mingled bewilderment and annoyance. Yet, even as my eyes noted these details, my reason was telling me that it could not be the same man. Even with the aid of an airplane it would have been smart work for him to take off, fly three miles, land, and enter my house unseen all within five minutes.

"How on earth——" I began, and at the sound of my voice he stopped rubbing his shin, which had evidently come into forcible contact with the overturned chair, and glanced round, as if for the first time aware of my presence.

"Oh," he said in a tone of apology. "Sorry . . . I didn't know . . . had no idea . . . a little miscalculation on my part . . ."

And forthwith his figure became hazy and indistinct, shimmered unsteadily for an instant like an object viewed through heated air—then vanished completely!

IT IS useless for me to try to record my sensations at that moment. Fully awake, dead sober, and in complete possession of my faculties, I had witnessed the impossible. A living man, substantial enough to talk and to bark his shins against a chair, had dissolved like a puff of smoke before my eyes.

The appearance and behavior of the man had been so commonplace, not to say absurd, that it never even occurred to me to set him down as being a ghostly apparition. If I regarded his arrival and departure as supernatural, it was only in the sense that it was something entirely outside the usual course of natural happen-

ings. I simply could not imagine a ghost wearing tweed plus-fours and red-and-green pull-over, and my common sense jibbed at the idea of a wandering disembodied spirit barging into a piece of furniture and afterward murmuring apologies after the manner of a too-festive reveller who had strayed into the wrong house by mistake. Dimly, and without any logical sequence of thought, the words "fourth dimension" intruded themselves into my bewildered brain. It was by no means clear to me how a fourth dimension—or even a fifth—could explain the transportation of a living man over three miles of hilly country at a speed of something like a mile a minute; but the words had a sane, scientific ring about them that was rather comforting to my then state of mind. No man likes to admit, even to himself, that he has been "seeing things."

Moved by a sudden impulse, I caught up the field-glasses and focused them on the window of the distant bungalow. By the faint light of the dying sun I saw the little bald-headed man fiddling about with his brass telescope as unconcernedly as ever, apparently in no way affected by his rapid double transit through space.

"I flatter myself that I am not unduly inquisitive," I muttered aloud as I laid down the glasses and caught up my hat and walking-stick, "but I think I am justified in looking into this matter a little deeper."

Five minutes later I was picking my way through the gathering dusk down the steep hillside path which led to the village.

It was quite dark long before I reached my destination. The night was clear and moonless, with myraid stars twinkling with steely brightness against the velvety sky above the wide sweep of the rolling hills. Most of the houses in the village were in darkness, but I noted with satisfaction that a light burned in the window of the bungalow, and as I drew nearer I could see the shadow of my mysterious visitor pass and repass as he busied himself at some task.

The absence of bell or knocker on the front door seemed to hint that callers were not encouraged, but without hesitation I raised my stick and tapped sharply on the panel. For a few minutes there was no response, and I was just on the point of repeating the summons more violently, when the door suddenly opened.

My attitude, with upraised stick, must have appeared threatening, for the little bald-headed man shrank back and raised his hands as though to ward off a blow.

"I know what you've come for," he cried, without giving me time to put in a word. "My unwarrantable intrusion this afternoon . . . all a mistake . . . I can explain everything. I never intended to frighten you."

"You didn't frighten me," I answered, "but you made me mighty curious to know how the trick was done."

"Trick?" he blinked his little round eyes as he repeated the word. "You think that what you witnessed was just a conjuring trick?"

"What else could it have been?" I shrugged.

For a moment he continued to blink at me in silence.

"Come inside," he said suddenly, and almost dragged me into the room that I had already partly examined by the aid of my field-glasses.

I immediately saw that the object I had thought to be a telescope was in reality something much more complicated. Instead of the usual single eyepiece, it had no less than three smaller brass tubes converging into the main focal cylinder. Two were fitted with lenses, but the third

terminated in a narrow adjustable metal band which, by its size and position, seemed intended to be fastened to the forehead of the observer. From various points of this strange instrument numerous insulated wires ran to an intricate and elaborate machine situated immediately behind the observer's chair. It was evident that this machine had but recently emerged from the experimental stage, for some of its component parts were held in position merely by huge blobs of red sealing-wax and others by common tin-tacks driven into the top of the table on which it stood. The only details that my non-scientific mind could recognize were several powerful storage batteries and what appeared to be an ordinary "magic lantern" of oxidized metal.

"You see, my little 'conjuring trick,' as you call it, requires quite a lot of apparatus," smiled the bald-headed man as he waved his hand toward the maze of gleaming brass. "I may as well confess that when I constructed all this I had a very different object in view from emulating the exploits of a stage magician. My —er—little intrusion into your privacy was quite accidental, I assure you. I was aiming for the hilltop above your house; but the tube must have shifted slightly, and I was as much surprized as you were to find myself in your study. But it might have happened worse," he went on, thoughtfully stroking his plump chin. "It would have been distinctly embarrassing, for instance, if I had found myself in the presence of a highly-strung, nervous female."

His casual, almost apologetic manner robbed his explanation of much of its impressiveness; it was only by marshaling the facts in my own mind that I could grasp the staggering significance of what I had heard and seen.

"Do you mean to say that you are able to transport yourself bodily through space?" I cried, my voice jerky with excitement.

"Bodily?" he emphasized the word as he repeated it, shaking his head dubiously the while. "Ah, there you place me in a difficulty. You must understand that I live and work entirely alone, and I have no one to observe what takes place in this room when I project my conscious ego elsewhere. Tell me, did I seem to be a solid, physical body when I appeared to you?"

"You were solid enough to knock over a chair and swear when you barked your shin." I laughed as an idea occurred to me. "You had better let me test that point for you. Waft me into the strongroom of the nearest bank, and I'll see if my fingers are material enough to grab a few souvenirs!"

He shook his head quite seriously at my joking suggestion.

"Quite apart from the questionable honesty of such an experiment, I fear it would be foredoomed to failure. My Ego-Projector has its limits. The rays of energy which emanate from it are powerless to penetrate any solid obstacle which lies between the point of departure and the point desired to be attained. If you will take your mind back, you will remember that the large French window of your room was wide open when I arrived this afternoon. If I could find means of endowing my Ray with the same penetrative power as the ordinary wireless waves, my invention would be perfect."

"It's marvellous enough as it is," I cried with enthusiasm. "Imagine our country at war—with one of your machines in the front line, every detail at the back of the enemy's positions could be reported by ghostly spies!"

To my disappointment this eccentric inventor appeared to be annoyed at this suggestion.

"I have no intention of devoting my invention to the purposes of war," he returned curtly.

"No, no, of course not," I hastened to add. "But think of its possibilities in times of peace. Think of how it will cheapen and speed up travelling. With a few relays of your machines a party of hustling tourists could be wafted round Europe in less time than it takes to cross the Channel. And you need not confine your scope to this old world of ours. Think of the sensation that would be caused by an advertisement something like this: *"Five Minutes on the Moon—heating apparatus and supply of oxygen provided."*

"Doubtless it would greatly interest the Lunacy Commissioners!" he returned dryly. "But why pick on a dead, sterile satellite like the Moon? Why not the planet Mars, which possesses water, an atmosphere, and—if the astronomers have rightly interpreted its periodic change of color—a vegetation that flourishes and decays at the Martian seasons corresponding to our earthly spring and autumn?"

"You think that there is life on Mars?" I queried.

"It would indeed be surprizing if there were not," he answered emphatically. "When you consider the abundance of vitality which exists on our own planet, and realize that there is scarcely a single square yard, from the parched deserts of the Saharas to the eternal ice of the poles—including the abysmal depths of the ocean, where the pressure reaches the enormous total of three and three-quarters tons to the square inch—that is not without some form of life, however lowly, it would be more logical to doubt the *absence* of life on our sister-planet than its *presence!* What reasoning man doubts that the whole of our solar system had a common origin? And, having a common origin, it naturally follows that all the planets must be composed of the same elements, and this conclusion is supported by the evidence of the spectroscope. Now, it may surprize you to know that living protoplasm, the basic molecule of all life, is made up of six simple elements—oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, phosphorus and sulfur. If Mars has these elements, it has all the fundamentals that on Earth resulted in the generation of what we call life."

"But intelligent life is another matter," I objected. "Your hypothetical Martians are scarcely likely to be highly developed creatures like ourselves."

"On the contrary, my dogmatic young friend, the dominant type there may be higher than it is here. On Earth the lowest forms of living organisms are found in the ocean; the highest, culminating in man, on land. Mars is nearly all land. It is an older planet, too, inasmuch as, being smaller, it has cooled much more rapidly. Probably it was habitable when our own planet was yet a molten mass, as giant Jupiter is at the present time, and thus the Martians may be millions of years ahead of us in the evolutionary race."

"But surely they would not be of a human type?" I cried.

"Why not, pray?" he returned, with a smiling shrug. "Have you ever paused to consider how nature is content to keep to broad generic lines when fashioning the most diverse animals? Disregarding the highly specialized order of reptiles commonly called 'snakes,' can you name a single air-breathing vertebrate that possesses more or less limbs than four? more or less eyes than two? more nostrils than a single pair? more mouths than one? From the smallest lizard to the largest ele-

phant, the vital processes of life are identical. If creatures of such widely different habitat have so many points in common, why should not the dominant creature of another planet have developed along similar lines to the dominant creature on Earth? Judging by the evidences of their handiwork, we can at least be sure that their mental processes are the same as ours."

"How?" I demanded incredulously.

INSTEAD of answering immediately, my self-appointed mentor sat down at the desk and drew a rough circle on the blotting-pad.

"Let this represent the planet Mars, and let us assume that the more progressive and intelligent nations of the human race had been transported there *en masse* and, in order to survive, were forced to contend with the conditions which prevail. They would find themselves on a globe very different from the one they had quitted. On Earth, deep oceans cover nearly three-quarters of the surface; on Mars the only water is found at the north and south poles, the remainder of the surface being a flat, waterless desert. Throughout the Martian winter, which lasts twice as long as ours, this water is useless as an irrigating agent, for it is frozen into a solid mass of ice which is plainly visible through our telescopes. But in the spring this water melts, and the problem which would confront our hypothetical human pioneers would be to conduct this life-giving fluid to the more temperate zones, where it could be used to water the crops necessary for the support of animal life. If you were in their place, how would you solve that problem?"

"By a system of pipes and pumping-machinery," I answered promptly.

He shook his head almost sadly.

"Allow me to remind you that a water-pipe does not *irrigate* the soil through which it passes, nor is it easy to conceive pipes large enough to supply the needs of a parched hemisphere. Nothing but the construction of *canals* would meet the situation. Broad, straight, lined on either bank with a belt of cultivated land, and spread like a network over the whole surface of the planet—only thus could the problem of continued existence under Martian conditions be solved. And when this gigantic irrigation scheme had been perfected, how would its operation appear to an observer on the Earth? At the approach of the Martian spring he would see the polar caps gradually shrink in size as the frozen water melted. Then a narrow band of faint blue would appear at the edges of the dwindling patch of white —a visible result of the thaw. Then, after a pause long enough to allow for sprouting, he would see, starting from the border of the polar cap and slowly creeping down toward the equator, a network of faint dark lines—the vegetation of the field-bordered canals, which has been quickened into life by the released water. And that is precisely what our astronomers see every year. They can not see the inhabitants of Mars, it is true, but they can, and do, observe the results of their intelligent handiwork."

I could not help smiling at the deadly earnestness with which he aired his theory. "As you're so keen on the matter," I said flippantly, "why don't you take a trip to Mars and have a look round?"

"Such is my intention," came his answer, swift as an echo. "Unfortunately, however, I have no one capable of controlling my Ego-Projector and thus ensuring my safe return."

"Can I be of any assistance?" I asked, and to my surprize he nodded eagerly.

"You can, by undertaking the journey for me."

I've often wondered since what my face

must have looked like when he made this cool proposal, but if my thoughts were reflected on my features I must have worn a pretty complicated expression. For a moment or two my mind was in a whirl. I did not know whether to laugh or be angry.

"Thanks," I said, finally deciding to fall in with the humor of what must be a joke on his part. "But I didn't intend taking quite such a long stroll when I set out this evening. A matter of thirty or forty millions of miles, is it not?"

"At the present time Mars is about 40,500,000 miles distant from the Earth."

"Is that so?" I queried with a laugh. "Well, a few hundreds of thousands of miles don't matter much one way or the other in a little jump like that!"

But my satire was entirely wasted on him.

"Of course not," he agreed quite seriously. "If my theory is correct you will arrive at your objective almost instantly."

"But if your theory does *not* happen to be correct, I suppose I shall spend the next few centuries wandering about in the inky black nowheres of outer space!" I cried with some show of indignation. "Life is too short for trial trips into the ether."

He looked quite disappointed at my refusal to avail myself of his highly scientific mode of suicide.

"Sure you wouldn't care for a little trip to the moon?" he asked coaxingly. "It's a mere hop by comparison, only 240,000 miles or so——"

I shook my head firmly and reached for my hat, more than half convinced that I was in the presence of a lunatic.

"The only hop that I am going to do tonight will be in the direction of home," I said hastily, and began to edge toward the door.

"What about a little drink before you go?"

His suggestion made me pause and glance back at him. At that moment he appeared eminently sane and normal.

"All right," I said, little suspecting the treachery that lay behind his hospitable offer. "Mix me a Martian cocktail."

He took me at my word. The instant I had swallowed the stuff I knew that something was wrong. A deadly mist seemed to swirl up and envelop my brain, rendering it dazed and numb.

"You perfidious devil!" I tried to shout. "You've drugged me!"

Rallying my failing strength, I staggered to my feet and lurched toward him. But the floor of the room seemed to reel and sway like the deck of a storm-tossed ship. I stumbled—fell—and as I touched the floor the last vestiges of consciousness slipped from me.

Out of an oblivion that might have lasted seconds or centuries, dawning consciousness stole back to my brain. I was seated in a chair which I instinctively knew to be the seat connected with the Ego-Projector, although the main portion of the machinery of the devilish contrivance was out of sight behind me. My arms were firmly lashed to the side-rests of the chair; my ankles were similarly fastened to the chair-legs; around my neck was a metal band which, while loose enough to allow me to breathe freely, was yet sufficiently tight to prevent my moving my head more than a fraction of an inch on either side. Before me, poised at an angle on its heavy iron tripod, was the gleaming tube of the huge telescope. With a heart-chilling sense of helplessness I realized I was a passive plaything in the hands of a man who could not be otherwise than insane.

"I am sorry I had to resort to drastic measures," said a smooth voice at my elbow, "but I can assure you that the unique experience you are about to undergo will

amply compensate you for any little temporary inconvenience."

Slewing my eyes round, I saw the pallid face of my captor creased in a satisfied smile. But what interested me most at that moment was the fact that he held an open razor in his hand. He must have seen my expression of horror, for his smile broadened and he patted me reassuringly on the shoulder.

"Have no fear, my young friend. I have not inveigled you here in order to obtain a human subject for dissection. I have already done all I intend to do with this razor." He wiped it carefully and slipped it into its case as he continued coolly. "The trifling and bloodless capillary amputation that I have just performed on you will leave no traces after a week or two has elapsed. I have merely taken the liberty of shaving the top of your head."

I had been vaguely conscious of an unusual sensation of draftiness about the region of my occiput, but I had thought it due to my excited imagination. Now I realized that the crown of my head was as bare as his own.

"Perhaps it was not absolutely necessary to remove the hair," he went on thoughtfully. "In my own case nature has done that very effectively for me already; but now that you are about to test my invention, I did not wish to leave the slightest obstacle that might mar the successful working of my Ray, for it is just possible that the experiment may not be repeated. You have, of course, heard of the Pineal Gland?"

"Yes," I answered promptly, hoping to switch the conversation into something less personal than my own anatomy. "But I had mine removed seven years ago, so it's no earthly use your trying to interfere with something that isn't there. Let's talk about politics. What is your candid opinion of the present government?"

Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have forgotten all about glands when invited to air their views on how a country should be run, but this lunatic refused to be side-tracked.

"Don't be foolish," he said indulgently. "The Pineal Gland is a small and obscure organ imbedded deep in the human brain. In many respects it resembles a primitive, undeveloped eye, and its position and general characteristics closely correspond with the so-called 'third eye' of a few living—and of many extinct—species of lizards. Now it is a curious fact that, in spite of the progress of modern science, no pathologist has succeeded in determining the exact function of this Pineal Gland."

"Then why worry about it?" I murmured soothingly, for I feared that his next announcement would be to the effect that he intended to gain the desired knowledge by an immediate experiment. "Perhaps the wretched thing hasn't got a function."

"On the contrary, my young friend, I have already proved it to be capable of exercising a most wonderful influence over the brain of which it forms a part. Although destined never to see the light of day, this primitive eye, when stimulated by a certain type of invisible yet penetrating ray, becomes endowed with the power of transporting the mental ego—the 'soul,' in the strictly non-religious sense of the word—to the point where that ray is directed. If you will glance through that telescope while I adjust the focus, you will see the sphere to which you are about to be transported."

It was not wholly because I knew that resistance would be futile that I allowed him to adjust the metal band round my forehead. I was filled with an ex-

pectant curiosity that mastered my fear. If the man was crazed, he had at least some glimmering of method in his madness; if he was sane, I was about to undergo an experience such as had fallen to the lot of no man before.

Eagerly I gazed through the double eyepiece of the telescope, but for some seconds I could see only a confused blur of light. Soon, under the influence of the adjusted focus, this resolved itself into a tiny globe glowing with soft radiance as it hung poised amid the unfathomable blue of space. Its general color was pale yellow, slightly tinged with rose, but there were irregular darker areas where the tint approached the delicate blue of a bird's egg; at top and bottom were the dazzling white segments of the polar ice-caps.

"That is the planet which the ancients named after the God of War, but you may find it to be the Planet of Peace." He chuckled softly as he went on. "You may even find it to be the Planet of Too Much Peace!"

"How can a world have too much peace?" I asked. "Is war such a desirable thing that you should speak slightingly of peace?"

Again he chuckled softly, and this time there was an underlying note of grimness.

"War played its part—and no minor part, either—in shaping both the mental outlook and the bodily frame of the animal that we call man," he answered with quiet conviction. "I do not mean the war of modern trained armies, nor even the war of nation against nation, or of tribe against tribe. I mean the war of individual against individual, such as was once waged by primitive man and is even now being waged by the beasts of the jungle. Do you imagine that mankind would have developed along the lines it actually has if each individual man had but to lie on his back all day with an abundance of the necessities and luxuries of life within easy reach? No, my impractical young theorist, man became what he is because he had to *fight!* He fought for the food he ate, for the cave that sheltered him, for possession of his mate; in short, he fought for his very existence. Those who were too mild or too weak to fight died very young, leaving it to their fiercer and more combative brothers to carry on the race and transmit their war-like instincts to the next generation. And men still fight one against the other, though now the battlefield has been transferred from the jungle to the town or city, and he uses his wits instead of a spear or ax of flint. And until recently the man who could not or would not fight (or 'work,' as we now call it) was exterminated as surely, though not as swiftly, as in ancient times. But during the last few years I have noted a growing tendency among the citizens of one powerful nation to prevent this natural process of elimination by protecting and succoring its individual members who either can not or will not take part in the modern struggle for existence. Forgetful of, or maybe ignorant of the prehistoric development of their own race, these tender-hearted dreamers seek to promote universal brotherhood and equality by doing away with the competition that is the mainspring of human progress. They proclaim an artificial peace where peace has never reigned since this Earth became habitable. If such a doctrine became universal it would be interesting to note its effect on the human race. You and I will be dust long before such a state of things can come into operation on this Earth of ours; but possibly you may see the ultimate result of such a system in the place you are going to."

"On Mars?" I cried, vastly interested in the strange and bizarre theory that had just been expounded. "You think that universal peace reigns on Mars?"

He nodded his head slowly.

"Probably every species of dangerous animals has been exterminated there ages ago, and the mere existence of its world-wide system of water-bearing canals implies a united effort on the part of its inhabitants in which all racial and national differences would need to be sunk for the common good. I am convinced that the present state of Mars is closely analogous to the state of our Earth in ages yet to come, and it is your proud privilege to witness the dying phase of a once-powerful race before its final extinction."

He paused and laid his hand on a small vulcanite lever connected with the mechanism of the Projector.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Rather!" I exclaimed, moved by an enthusiasm that has since surprized me. "You have interested me to such an extent that I would go, even if I were not compelled."

He leaned over and patted my hand.

"Good lad," he said in a tone that at any rate sounded sincere. "I will give you six hours before I reverse this lever and bring your conscious Ego back to Earth. And I would give much to behold what you will behold during that space of time. But that is impossible, so it only remains for me to wish you a pleasant journey—and a safe return. For six hours, *au revoir!*"

There was a sharp click as the lever slid home—a faint humming noise—then darkness came like the shutting of an eye.

I HAVE often tried to analyze my sensations during the time which followed immediately after the pressing of the lever that sent my subjective Ego hurtling through space, but on every occasion I have failed. Physically I must have been as inert as if I had inhaled a dose of chloroform, and as oblivious of the passage of time. Indeed, I feel inclined to doubt if my journey through space did actually take any measurable amount of time at all. A ray of light, which travels at a velocity of 186,000 miles a second, could leap the intervening distance in something like five minutes, and at the most modest estimate I can not conceive the Projector-ray travelling more slowly. I might have settled the point definitely if I had thought to glance at my watch on my arrival, but when I next became conscious of my surroundings I found my attention fully occupied with the strange scene which greeted my eyes.

Forgetful of the fact that my flight had been directed toward the portion of the Martian disk that was reflecting the rays of the sun, and remembering only that I had departed from the Earth at night-time, I was for a moment astounded to find myself in broad daylight, with brilliant sunshine streaming from a point so high in the heavens that it could not have been far from its noonday zenith.

I was lying on the slope of a hillside of bare, yellowish rock which, had I encountered it on the Earth, I should have judged to be sandstone. Below me, and separated from my point of observation by a series of fantastic, swelling curves utterly destitute of trees or shrubs, or even the humblest form of vegetation, was a flat desert of what appeared to be sand, stretching unbroken to the furthermost horizon. The sun appeared smaller than when we view it from the Earth, but its rays, undimmed by even the faintest film of cloud in the crystal-clear sky, illuminated every detail of the desolate scene with merciless distinctness.

Keyed up as I was with the expectation of beholding prodigies, I felt my heart sink as I gazed round that stark, forbidding waste of sand. My feelings were something like those of an earthly aviator who, heading for London or Paris, sud-

denly finds himself stranded in the midst of the Sahara.

"The Sahara!" My voice sounded thin and weak in the rarefied atmosphere as I repeated the words aloud. "The Earth has its deserts, but it has also its populous cities. May not Mars have its cities, too?"

Catching hope at the rebound, I turned and began to clamber up toward the rocky crest of the hill. The going was rough, but I seemed to make remarkably good progress. Leaping to clear a fissure about a yard wide, I found that I had overshot the farther edge by a good three yards. It was only then that I remembered that the pull that held me to the ground was much less than the terrestrial gravity to which I had been hitherto subject. But I soon accustomed my muscles to this novel state of affairs, and presently I was performing feats of agility that would turn an earthly champion high-jumper green with envy.

In an incredibly short time I reached the summit, and how different was the scene that burst on my view as I cleared the last rocky ridge! The desert was still there, it is true, but on this side it was reduced to a mere strip of barrenness three miles, at the most, in width. Beyond that were orderly fields of luxuriant crops, interlaced with narrow silver streams of water whose straightness and symmetry proclaimed their artificial origin. Beyond this belt of vegetation two broader bands of silver converged as they neared the farther horizon. They were twin canals, spanned at intervals by mighty bridges and lined on either bank with wide roads of gleaming white on which strangely shaped vehicles passed and repassed with amazing swiftness.

But for me all these evidences of intelligent handiwork paled into insignificance before the mass of building which rose tier on tier at a spot where a third, single canal intersected the other two. It was a Martian city—and one of some importance, judging by its size and the splendor of its buildings. Its general shape was that of a flattened pyramid, but such a bald geometrical comparison conveys no adequate idea of its actual aspect; for the severe outline was broken and diversified by swelling domes, lofty towers, and intricately beautiful lace-like structures which soared into the sky like symmetrical cascades of water suddenly frozen into stone. Viewed from my pinnacle of sun-scorched barren rock, it seemed more like the fairy city of a dream than a structure planned and reared by material beings.

"If that is the dwelling-place of those who live in perpetual peace," I found myself murmuring, "what an object-lesson that beautiful city would be to the rival nations of the Earth!"

PAUSING only long enough to take my bearings by the position of the sun, I set off down the hillside in a series of nightmare leaps and bounds. There may be an excess of oxygen in the Martian atmosphere, or perhaps it was due merely to the diminished force of gravity, but I seemed like a man suddenly endowed with superhuman strength and energy. Nor was the change confined to my physical sensations. A sense of wild elation filled my brain. I have a dim memory of laughing aloud and singing senseless songs. Had I encountered any one at that moment I fear I should have conveyed to his mind a very sorry estimate of the mental equilibrium of the inhabitants of the Earth. It is fortunate that I let myself go just when I did, for my first outburst of exuberance had exhausted itself by the time I had crossed the stretch of sand and reached the cultivated fields.

I call them "fields" only because of their vast extent. "Gardens" would be a more fitting term, for they seemed to produce nothing but attractive-looking though

unfamiliar fruit trees, arranged in a manner similar to our ornamental flower-beds. Paved walks, with stone seats set at regular intervals, completed its resemblance to a great public park.

At first I thought it had been raining, for the air felt delightfully cool and moist after the parched heat of the desert; but presently I saw a thin jet of water spring from the ornamental border of one of the "fruit-beds," rising high in the air and falling on the trees in a thin artificial rain.

Slight as the detail was in itself, it gave me my first real insight into the Martian mind. I could not help admiring the ingenious manner in which they had converted an apparently insurmountable climatic drawback into a positive advantage. By applying a regulated amount of moisture just when and where it was needed, they had placed themselves in a far better condition than that of depending on the erratic movements of wind-driven rain-clouds which discharge their contents on field and city indiscriminately. I thought of the devastating droughts and the floods that bring death and destruction to whole regions of our earth, and I decided that the Martians were to be envied, rather than pitied, for the physical conditions which prevail on their planet.

Meditating thus, I turned a sharp angle of the path and found myself face to face with one of the inhabitants of Mars.

In spite of the professor's words, I had fully expected to find the Martians strange creatures of fearsome aspect. But the individual before me was very human-looking indeed, and not an uncomely specimen, either.

Of medium height, with a smooth, delicately tinted face and a slender figure elegantly draped in a saffron-colored garment cut on lines strongly reminiscent of the costume of the ancient Greeks, it might equally well have been a girl or a good-looking boy in his teens. The single, very abbreviated garment left legs and arms completely bare, and its general effect made me wonder if I had encountered a Martian swimming enthusiast on the way to an afternoon dip.

For a moment we stared at each other in silence. I put up my hand to raise my hat, but finding that I had come away bareheaded, I executed what was intended for a graceful bow.

"Good afternoon," I said politely.

Of course I didn't expect to be understood, but I trusted to my tone of voice and facial expression to convey that my intentions were peaceable. I must have appeared harmless enough, for the Martian smiled back at me and said something which sounded like a friendly greeting.

"I am a messenger from the planet Earth," I went on impressively.

I didn't expect that to be understood, either, but to my amazement the pretty creature seemed to catch my drift.

"Earth—world," it said in very tolerable English, and pointed to the sky with much the same gesture that we should use in drawing attention to a familiar star.

To say that I was puzzled would be to describe my actual feelings very faintly. I knew that in uttering the word "Earth" the Martian might have merely repeated parrot-like the word I had just used. But I had certainly not mentioned "world," yet the two words had been correlated as naturally as if the fellow had been familiar with the English language all his life.

"Do you understand English?" I asked hopefully, and my bewilderment increased when I got a string of friendly but totally incomprehensible words in reply.

"Earth," I prompted, pointing to the sky.

"Earth—world—globe," said the Mar-

tian, with an air of a child proudly displaying its knowledge.

Here was another English word that I had not imported into Mars. Evidently my young friend was well acquainted with the usual synonyms for "Earth" and at the same time quite ignorant of colloquial English. This was interesting, but it did not seem likely to prove very instructive. I felt as a tourist in Paris would feel if he asked a Frenchman the way to the railway station and was treated to a quotation from Shakespeare instead. I gave up the problem with a shrug and turned with the intention of proceeding on my way to the city. It was then that I discovered we were not alone.

Five Martians, dressed in garments of various colors but in every other respect similar to that worn by the one with whom I was conversing, had silently approached and were regarding me with much the same excited wonder as a group of village children exhibit at the sight of a dancing bear or a monkey on an organ. My doubts as to the sex of the first Martian were set at rest by the appearance of these newcomers, for their style of dress was the same and they were undoubtedly women. I began to wonder if I had wandered into the grounds of a young ladies' finishing-school which specialized in physical culture on classical lines.

The girl in the saffron-hued robe said something to the others in which I distinctly caught the word "Earth," whereupon they crowded round me, subjecting my clothes, and finally myself, to a scrutiny that was distinctly embarrassing to a bashful man. I had neglected to shave that morning, and my stubbly beard was the star turn of the show. One after the other, and sometimes two at the same time, they insisted on stroking my cheeks and chin with their hands in a manner not usually indulged in—at least not in public—on the planet I had recently quitted. The shaven patch on the top of my head came in for its share of attention, though it did not appear to excite the same degree of wonder as my beard. I began to feel like a pet poodle at a dog show, and when another dozen or so Martian maidens came running up, evidently no less eager with curiosity, I thought it was time I made a move.

Frowning a dignified and majestic disapproval of further investigations into my physical aspect, I pointed to the distant city and intimated by signs that it was my intention to make my way there without delay. I must have made my meaning plain, for the girl in saffron, who seemed to have assumed a proprietary interest in me on the childrens' principle "I found it first," now took me by the hand and conducted me in the desired direction.

I have since gained considerable amusement by trying to picture what I must have looked like stalking at the head of that procession of near-Greek damsels. My solitary mode of life on the Sussex Downs had made me rather careless in the matter of attire. If I had known what was in store for me I would have come arrayed in the most regal vestment that a theatrical costumer could supply. As it was, I wore a pair of flannel trousers, picturesquely bagged at the knees and fringed at the bottoms, and a tweed sports coat that had seen better days—a good many better days—to say the honest truth. Altogether I must have presented a spectacle far more curious than beautiful.

But the Martian populace were easily pleased. They flocked toward me from every side, and by the time I had reached one of the broader thoroughfares my advance had become a sort of triumphal progress along the center of the way, with a densely packed mass of people on either side.

There were several points about that crowd which struck me as being curious. There were no police or other officials to keep order; no one Martian seemed to have any more authority than the others; and, though I scanned their faces and figures as narrowly as I could, I could not detect a single member of that immense throng that belonged to the male sex.

Slowly but surely the staggering conviction was forced on my mind. *Mars was a planet inhabited solely by women.*

MY ARRIVAL at what for want of a better name I must call the Headquarters of the City was marked with much excitement but with a total absence of ceremony. Led by the saffron-robed girl, I mounted the steps and entered the open door of the immense central building with as little ceremony as I should have entered a public library on earth.

I caught a fleeting glimpse of a large hall, well proportioned and imposing, though not oppressively so; then my guide steered me along a corridor and up a staircase, and presently we passed beneath a low arch and entered a smaller room. I may here place on record the fact that never once during my stay did I see a door that was capable of being closed.

The room was very sparsely furnished, yet it was so well-proportioned and tastefully decorated that it appeared far from bare. At first I was much puzzled by the fact that, although it had no windows, the light with which it was flooded was almost as strong as in the open air. Presently, however, I perceived that the gleaming white stone of which it was constructed was in itself semi-transparent, so that the sunlight actually penetrated the walls and ceiling.

At the farther end of the room a woman was seated at a bronze desk-like arrangement of fantastic design. On our entry she was engaged in listening attentively to a stream of words in the Martian language that issued from a trumpet-mouth which formed part of the desk. As we came forward she stretched out her hand to a lever and the voice abruptly ceased. I strongly suspect that the voice had been informing her of my advent, for she showed no surprize when she turned and looked at me. I on my part was busy taking in every detail of her dress and appearance.

Judged by earthly standards her age appeared to be about thirty, but maybe it was the tranquil majesty of her expression, rather than any actual indications of the passage of time, that made her seem so old. During my progress through the city I had been struck by the fact that the standard of personal beauty among the Martians was unusually high, but the loveliness of this regal creature easily surpassed any I had hitherto seen. Her height was a little above the medium, and her figure, lightly draped in a robe of shimmering wine-color that deepened to a rich purple in its folds, was slender and exquisitely molded. The only indication of her rank was the narrow fillet of gold which encircled her short, dark hair. But she needed no diadem to proclaim her queenly status, for her carriage and expression betokened one born to command.

For perhaps a minute she stood eyeing me in silence, a slight smile playing about the curves of her full, red lips. Then came a thing so incredible that I hesitate to set it down lest it should impugn the veracity of this plain statement of facts.

"Good afternoon, everybody," she said in the carefully enunciated Oxford accent of a radio announcer. "The Queen of Mars calling the Messenger from Earth. Are you from 2LO or 5XX? I should be glad to hear your News Bulletin-copyright - by - Reuter - Press - Association -

and-Central News." She pronounced the final ten words as though they were one.

Now, I've met with a few knockdown surprizes in my life, but never have I experienced such a shock as when I heard that radiant, queenly creature begin to talk after the manner of a two-valve receiving-set.

"You understand our Earthly language?" I cried in amazement.

The Martian queen nodded her shapely head and laughed.

"I'll say I do. We've been trying to communicate with your planet for years and years, but either your instruments are not sensitive enough to receive our signals, or else you have set them down to some amateur wireless joker trying to pull your leg. But we have listened to your radio broadcasts all the time, and by degrees we have compiled a vocabulary and grammar of your language."

My heart sank and I felt myself going red all over. If this divine creature had based her estimate of earthly intelligence on *some* wireless programs that I had heard put over, she must inevitably look upon me as belonging to a race of moribund half-wits.

Gently but firmly I explained to her that the apex of human aspirations was not represented by the mentality of the British Broadcasting Company. She appeared to grasp my point with surprizing quickness.

"I understand," she said, nodding and regarding me more kindly. "The stuff we have been listening to is merely intended for those of your race who are not sufficiently intelligent to read a book."

I was in no mood for long, involved explanations, so I did not attempt to contradict her. I was more anxious to learn about the conditions of life on Mars than to waste time in trying to gage the mental make-up of the average radio fan. I put a few pertinent questions, and found her by no means unwilling to talk. Bidding me be seated, she told me many surprizing things. Taken on the whole, her English was very clear and concise, but now and again I had to help her out with a word or suggestion, especially toward the end of her explanation.

The recorded history of Mars, I learnt, covered a period of nearly two million years. In some of its earlier phases it formed a striking parallel to the history of our own planet. There were the same alternate periods of warfare and peaceful progress; the same succession of nations dominant for a while, then decaying and sinking into oblivion as each in turn was conquered. At first they fought merely for the sake of plunder; then for aggrandizement and love of power; but in the end their wars were waged for possession of the dwindling water supply as the shallow Martian seas had shrunk and finally disappeared. Gradually the nature of the warfare changed with the changing conditions. Hitherto it had been a struggle of nation against nation, but when the only remaining bodies of water were those locked up for the greater part of the year in the polar ice-fields, it became a life-and-death struggle of the whole population against drought.

Long before the dawn of our own history—maybe long before the first terrestrial man had chipped his first rude implement of flint—the Martian engineers had planned and constructed the gigantic system of canals capable of tapping the polar ice-caps as they melted every year, and conveying the precious fluid to the more temperate regions where, directly and indirectly, it could be turned to account to render the otherwise arid deserts capable of supporting life. This war against natural forces was the greatest, the most prolonged, and the most desper-

ate war that the Martians ever waged. They were fighting for their very existence as a race, and they knew it. It was indeed "a war to end war" in a much truer sense than was the empty slogan with which our earthly ears have been tickled within recent years. And when in the end they had triumphed, they found to their surprize that the last Martian war had been fought.

The more backward races of the planet had been exterminated in the struggle for continued existence; the more enlightened had co-operated and fused during their exertions for the common good. They had conquered their bitterest, their most implacable enemy, Death; and henceforth they were at peace.

And for untold ages peace reigned on that happy planet. Generation after generation saw the light and passed away not knowing the meaning of the word "struggle," for in that artificial Utopia they had not even to struggle to live. Brain power took the place of brute strength as a deciding factor in the march of progress; the female no longer needed the combative male to provide her with the necessities of life. From a servile slave or a pampered plaything, woman became to all intents and purposes the effective equal of man.

Then indeed did it seem as if the acme of Martian bliss had been reached. The desert blossomed like a rose in literal truth, and there was enough for all with a minimum of effort. The fortunate people of these ages revelled in a paradise of plenty.

But nature, ever patient, ever watchful, was but biding her time for a great crushing revenge on those who flouted her immutable laws. Not for mere caprice had the fighting male been called into existence; not by mere chance is it decreed that his numbers shall increase in proportion to the female population when the need for him is greatest, and dwindle when the community no longer needs his protecting presence. On Earth the birth statistics during the recent Great War led to this fact being dimly recognized, though not completely understood. And the law of gravitation is not more universal or far-reaching than the law of utility. An organism, be it mammoth or microbe, that no longer fulfills its intended purpose is no longer perpetuated or even tolerated in the economy of nature. Fallen from his high estate, man had disappeared from Mars as completely as the mammoth and dinosaur had disappeared from the surface of the Earth.

It was perhaps inevitable that there should occur several baffling and irritating gaps at this stage of the narrative. The stock of words at the disposal of my informant consisted only of those which had been gleaned from radio programs, and the vocabulary thus acquired, though sufficiently varied and flexible for the discussion of ordinary subjects, proved but a poor vehicle in which to convey the explanation of the several vital points that puzzled me. I was, for instance, very curious to know how the continuity of the Martian race had been effected after the last man had become extinct. But here my informant's vocabulary became tantalizingly meager and limited—which was not to be wondered at, considering that human biology is a subject not usually regarded with favor by the directors of radio programs. I hesitate to place on record a theory that may be due to misunderstanding on my part, but I gained the impression that on Mars synthetic chemistry has reached heights as yet only dimly glimpsed by the most daring of our own scientists.

But, quite apart from details that would be of interest only to professional biologists, the great fact remained that

Mars had paid dearly for her state of perpetual peace. Woman had grasped sovereignty only to find her prize turn to ashes in her hands. Undisputed queen though she was, her kingdom was pitifully barren of all save the material needs of life. The Planet of Peace had become a world devoid of human love. . . .

All this the queen of Mars told me, and maybe much more; for in the end my thoughts wandered and I found myself paying more attention to the speaker than to the halting phrases which fell from her lips.

Was it merely my conceited fancy, or was there really a subtle undertone of tenderness in her voice as she spoke of the starved affections, the thwarted yearnings of her loveless people? Hitherto I had been so engrossed in the purely scientific side of her epitome of Martian history that I had quite lost sight of its personal aspect. Now, with a thrill of keenest excitement, I realized for the first time the stupendous possibilities that lay within my grasp. However insignificant a member I might be of the community I had recently quitted, here the crown of an empire—nay, of the whole planet!—was mine for the taking. And as I looked into the beautiful face of the Martian queen, never did kingship seem so desirable a thing.

I spoke no word of love, but something of my emotion must have communicated itself to her; for gradually she fell silent, and sat, her rounded bosom lifting and falling rapidly, her frank eyes mutely questioning mine.

"I came here to seek knowledge of another world," I said, lamely enough, "but I have found something more." And I raised her unresisting hand to my lips.

The poet who extolled the external power of love wrote truer than he knew. To her the tender passion must have been a thing as remote as were the circling orbs of space. Yet she did not even pretend to misunderstand my meaning.

Like the first flush of dawn in a sky that has been shrouded in eternal night, a wave of deep crimson crept up the ivory of her shapely throat until it dyed her cheeks with its glowing color. Like a proud lily bowing before the gale it was not fitted to withstand, her supple body swayed toward me. I felt her arms about me; her warm lips, trembling with an emotion that was not fear, on mine. . . .

Then, like a faulty cinema film which breaks off at the most engrossing part of the drama, the whole scene vanished into dense, impenetrable blackness.

When next I opened my eyes I did not commit the usual solecism by asking "Where am I?" I knew the answer to that question only too well!

I was in the untidy workshop of the little bungalow at the end of the Sussex village street. The bungalow idiot with the bald head was just in the act of returning his watch to his pocket.

"Your six hours are up, my young friend," he said cheerfully. "I took care to switch you back to Earth right on the exact minute. Did you have an interesting experience?"

I fear my immediate reply was not much to the point. Presently I grew calmer. "I want to go back to Mars," I told him bluntly. "And I want to stay there for good."

"Do you?" He eyed me strangely as he stroked his chin. "May I be permitted to ask why you are so eager to take up your permanent abode there?"

Like a simpleton, I related everything that had happened, down to the smallest detail that I could remember.

"You strike me as being a remarkably quick worker, young man," he observed dryly when I had finished. "In six hours

you had won—or were on the point of winning—a kingdom and a beautiful bride. It is a destiny that any one might well envy you. King of a planet!—undisputed lord of an entire world!"

For a while he paced the room, softly muttering the last words to himself over and over again. If I had guessed what was in his mind I should have choked the life out of him there and then. But I was too much engrossed in my own rosy dreams to attempt to gage the possible effect that my revelation might have on another man. Even when he at length came to a halt and seated himself in the chair of the Ego-Projector, I had no suspicion of his intended treachery. Blind, doubly blind fool that I was!

"It would certainly seem, my young friend, that between us you and I have stumbled on a great thing," he said, thoughtfully fingering the levers of the machine. "It has always been my idea that the greatest drawback of this world of ours is the lack of scope it offers to a man of real original genius. Yes, my friend, lack of scope," he repeated the phrase, with a kind of savage gusto. "Alexander, Hannibal, Cæsar, Napoleon, Tamerlane—in fact, every talented superman—had to win his way slowly and with infinite toil, through opposing armies before he made himself master of some insignificant part of the earth. Unlike them, the next man who visits Mars will, without striking a single blow, be master of a whole planet! Pray accept my sincere thanks for having demonstrated that fact so clearly, my young friend. And to those thanks it only remains for me to add one single word——" He paused, a grin of sardonic triumph creasing his pallid features; then shouted loudly, *"Farewell!"*

Then only did I sense his foul purpose. He was about to project himself to Mars and claim the prize that rightly should be mine.

Galvanized into action, I crossed the room at a single lunge.

"You cur!" I yelled in futile rage.

At my first sign of movement he had slid the starting-lever over to its fullest extent. The sound of a mocking laugh mingled with the now familiar humming note of the machine. One instant I caught a fleeting glimpse of his faint, ghost-like figure crouching in the chair. The next, my hands were vainly clutching at empty air.

Enraged almost to madness, I flung myself recklessly on the still faintly droning machine and tore at random at the intricate array of levers and switches, conscious only of a fixed desire to drag the traitor back to Earth and deal with him as he deserved. A voice, which I dimly recognized as my own, was uttering threats and curses.

"Once let me get to grips with him—man to man——"

A flash of vivid purple flame leapt from the mechanism at which I was blindly fumbling. The thud of a mighty concussion smote my ears. Impelled by what felt like a blow administered by the fist of a giant, I staggered back and fell headlong across the chaotic mass of twisted brass and fused and tangled wires which was all that remained of the Ego-Projector.

Slowly I rose to my feet and, steadying myself by grasping a leg of the overturned table, I looked out through the shattered window and groaned aloud in the bitterness of my hopeless disappointment.

Poised high in the heavens, aloof, majestic, and as yet undimmed by the blanching of the coming dawn, but glowing with the soft radiance of a rose-tinted jewel for ever beyond my reach, the Planet of Peace rode serenely on its appointed path, seeming to mock my misery across the now unpassable void of space.

The City of Crawling Death

By HUGH B. CAVE

Ants—droves of them—as big as panthers—ants that made slaves of men and threatened civilization with destruction

"THERE are two things," the Portygee said, "that we don't try to fight against—not in this rotten country. One of them is fever."

Raould Trench dropped into a chair beside him on the veranda of the frame hotel. It was hot, even for the Amazon region. Too hot to do anything but sit around in the shade and stare at the river. The town of Alemquer, six days slow travel up-river, was a smoldering furnace.

"And the other?" Trench said indifferently.

The Portygee lifted his shoulders in a slight shrug. Even conversation was difficult.

"Ants," he said. Then, after a pause: "They come, they go. That is an old saying in this region. When they come, the natives move out of the house. When they go, the natives move in again and the house is stripped clean of everything eatable. No bugs, no jiggers or cockroaches. Just—clean."

Trench moved his chair closer. Since he had started on this expedition to the Guaramadema River, along with Professor Heinrich Murgusson, he had heard nothing but scientific prattle. True, that sort of thing was to be expected from the professor, but six days of it had proved to be frightfully nerve-racking. Here was a chance to get into more interesting conversation.

"And the ants," urged Trench, "do they always leave?"

"Always. They come and go."

The Portygee lifted his hands descriptively, portraying in his native fashion the entrance and exit of droves of ants. As he did so, a figure moved quietly from the shadows of the hotel door and came across the veranda—a tall, rangy chap—Englishman, presumably—who leaned on the flimsy railing and faced the two men stolidly.

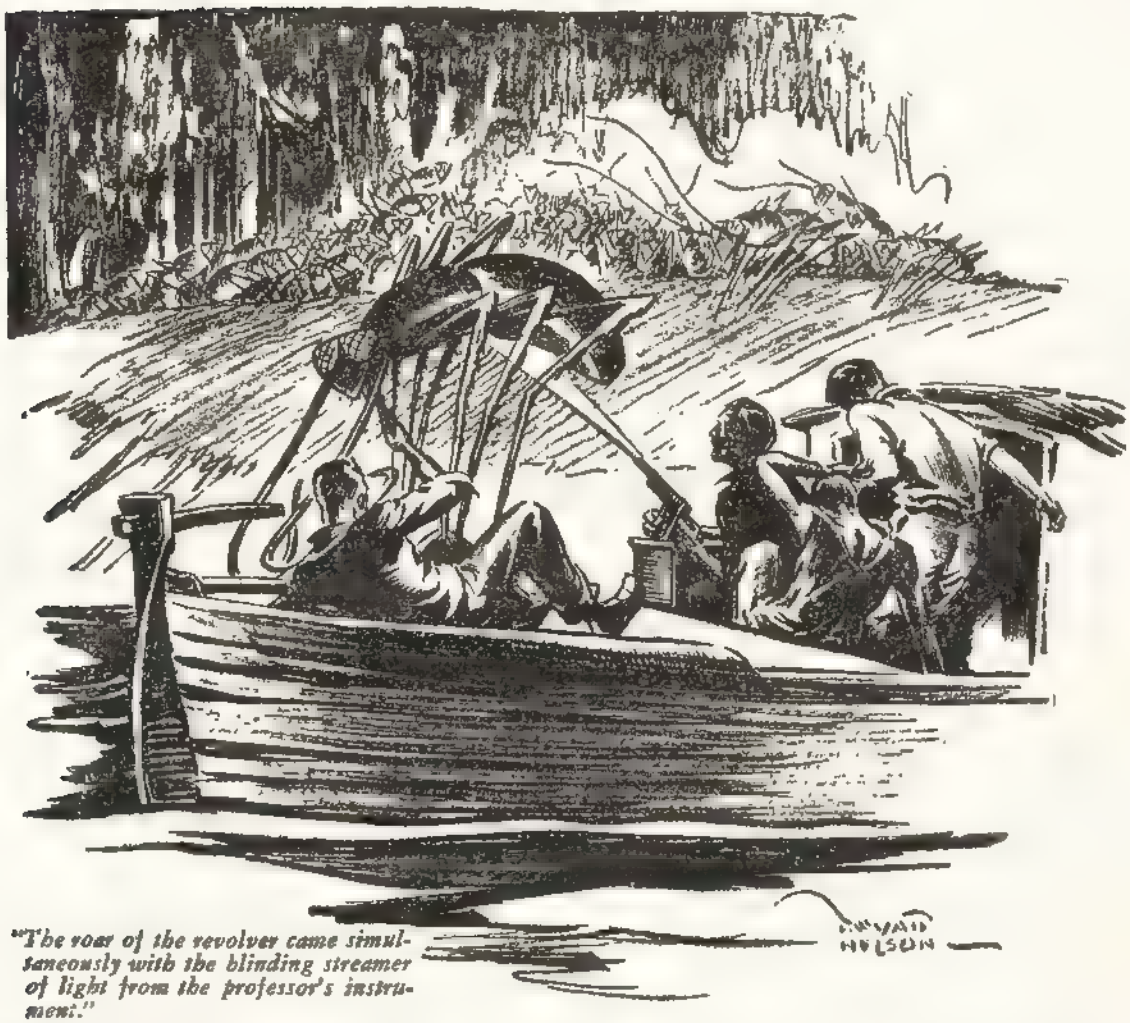
"Always?" he said, and there was a suggestive smile on his thin lips. "No. Not always."

The Portygee shrugged his shoulders again. Trench, sensing further relief from the monotony of the expedition—an expedition which, moreover, had been fostered by the Museum of Natural History, and so was doubly monotonous—looked quietly at the stranger and said:

"You mean they sometimes take possession for a good length of time?"

"I mean they take possession for ever. Not all kinds of ants, of course, but the one particular horde I'm speaking of. There are ants and ants, my friend. Did you ever hear of the *Manuel Reja*?"

Trench had not. For the past six days Trench had heard nothing but science and bugs, and the possibility that somewhere in this region of fever and slow death Doctor Richard Lord might be discovered. Lord had come down this way some two



"The roar of the revolver came simultaneously with the blinding streamer of light from the professor's instrument."

years ago on research work for the museum. He had never returned. Somewhere on the Amazon or on the Rio Negro, or possibly on the Guaramadema, he had vanished utterly. And there was a chance —or at least Murgusson said there was— that he might be found. Murgusson had never faced the impenetrable jungles of the Amazon!

But Trench had never heard of the *Manuel Reja.* The name carried a faint trace of familiarity, but he could not place it.

"She was a Brazilian gunboat," the stranger went on. "Steamed up here about three years ago under Captain Riella, a Creole. We went up-river under orders, and those orders were the strangest ever given. Upon the Batemo branch of the Guaramadema there was a little colony called Badama. A white man's colony. The place had been infested with ants, and the *Manuel Reja* was ordered up there to clean them out. Maybe you heard about that trip. It's history around these parts."

Trench nodded. Now that the stranger had mentioned some of the details, he did remember the story. Something about a plague of big ants. And this fellow, then. would be the Englishman, Carstairs, who had come back from that adventure.

"You're Henry Carstairs, then?" he asked casually.

"I'm Carstairs. Yes, I'm the fool who went with Riella on that mad expedition, to wipe out a handful of ants. I can see him now, the way he raved when he got the orders. 'Ants!' he yelled. "Damn dem all to eternidy! What can one man do against dem? Dey come, dey go, dey stop for no man!' "

Carstairs chuckled at the memory. The chuckle died, then, as the recollection became more acute and began to include more sinister things.

"The short of it is," he said abruptly, "the *Manuel Reja* never carried out those orders. Oh, we got to the settlement all right. No trouble about that. But we found the place completely wiped out, in possession of an army of ants as big as your fist. There was a battle and the ants won—that's about all. When we came back we left half of our native crew dead behind us."

Trench recognized the story as the one he had heard. Even now, however, he was slow to believe. His half-smile revealed his doubts and caused Carstairs to lean suddenly toward him. The Englishman's face was not pleasant.

"You don't know anything about ants, do you, my friend?" he said curtly.

"Very little," Trench admitted.

"Ants are like men," said Carstairs. "Organized devils with armies and leaders. There's a certain species prominent in this region that can build nests more than a hundred yards wide. We call them the leaf-cutters. They fight on the slightest pretext, and when they fight, their leaders urge them on. Those leaders don't bite a man in the lower part of his body; they climb to the neck and draw blood."

Carstairs drew back the sleeve of his shirt with a significant gesture. His arm, bronzed almost to native hue, was a mass of ancient scars.

"Ants did that," he said quietly. "A different kind of ants this time. Drivers. When the drivers make for your house, you get out. If you stayed you'd be dragged down by a million tiny insects and completely eaten."

Trench got out of his chair and stood facing his companion very quietly for an instant.

"And these gigantic ants in Badama," he questioned, "are they still there?"

Carstairs laughed. The laugh itself was suggestive.

"I haven't been back. Once was enough for me. If you're down here in the interests of science, you ought to investigate. When you come back—if you do—let me know about it, will you? I'm rather interested in how far those damned things have progressed in three years!"

RAOULD TRENCH went into the hotel shack alone. As he strolled through the empty lower hall, the Englishman's words persisted in coming back to him. He could think of only one thing. Could there be any connection between this reported tribe of gigantic ants and the disappearance of Doctor Richard Lord? Could it be that Lord, too, had heard the story of the ant-city and had fought his way into their captured settlement of Badama?

That night, in his room, Trench leaned over the table and told the story to Professor Murgusson. He told it from start to finish, just as the Englishman, Carstairs, had narrated it. When he had finished, he said quietly:

"You think, professor, that the yarn may have something to do with Doctor Lord's failure to return? Do you?"

Murgusson's eyes—dark, penetrating eyes sunk in a thick-jowled bearded face—came up slowly and stared without blinking.

"I should go to Badama anyway, Trench," he said deliberately, "even if

Doctor Lord had never existed. Perhaps we shall find a trace of him. Perhaps we shall find only ants. Are you prepared to leave?"

Trench nodded. The stagnant heat of Alemquer was driving him mad, along with its interminable flies and leeches and crawling things. He would have been glad to go anywhere.

And so, three days later, an oversized native *cuberta,* fitted in the waist with a tiny thatch cabin, moved between the close shores of the upper Bateno. The little, deserted monastery-building at Moju, overgrown by the in-creeping jungle, had appeared and vanished; and the *cuberta* crawled sluggishly on into unbroken jungle blackness.

Here the white man had not penetrated except to be driven back with relentless regularity. Here was a noisy, sinister pit of gloom. And beyond—some thirty-odd kilometers up-stream, according to Carstairs—lay the domain of the ants.

"We are nearly there," the Portygee said indifferently. "If the Englishman was speaking the truth, Badama is not far ahead."

Trench turned from his study of the shore. He could see the Portygee squatting in the bow, and somehow the sight of him brought a sense of quiet relief. The fellow was big and stolid, with a careless lack of interest that was reassuring. Trench was gladder than ever that he had picked the man up in Alemquer and brought him along as guide. He had already proved his worth in leading the expedition without error in its tortuous route up-river.

Professor Murgusson had been little help. Even now he was in the cabin, working over the infernal gun-like instrument which he had insisted on bringing along. For the entire three days he had puttered over it, answering every one of Trench's questions with the same mumbled words: "It will be needed, Trench, before we are back again in Alemquer!"

Trench turned back to the shore. Gay-colored birds were darting in and out of the semi-gloom. A huge black and white winged creature, vaguely related to the hornbill, flopped from the bank and volplaned over the *cuberta,* eyeing the boat with ghoulish, dissipated orbs. Something heavy and cumbersome splashed in the near-by reeds.

The boat snaked on, now beneath a blur of open sky, now under a drooling canopy of violent green aroideæ, obscenely shaped and hideous. And presently, noticing something more, Trench stared intently.

For a long while he stared, and for a long while he said nothing. Then, after peering at a certain distant point for nearly five minutes, he called softly to the Portygee.

"Manuelo, come here a minute. Quickly!"

The Portygee scrambled over the floor of the boat like a startled monkey. With both hands he took the glasses that Trench held out to him. He turned eagerly in the direction of Trench's outstretched hand and adjusted the "far-away-eyes" to his sight. For a while he too said nothing. Then:

"Ants," he said simply.

"I thought so," Trench nodded.

"Ants. Waiting for us."

They *were* waiting. A few moments later, when the *cuberta* had groped a quarter of the remaining distance, Trench could see without the aid of the glasses. The jungle broke apart there on the opposite bank, and a little clearing lined the shore. An ancient landing-place, long decayed, jutted into the black water. Without a doubt the desolate little amphitheater marked all that was left of the former settlement of Badama.

But was it desolate? The landing-place—in fact the entire waterfront—was lined with breastworks as high as a tall man's shoulders. And the breastworks were alive with watching eyes—eyes that were glaring with murderous malignity in the direction of the approaching *cuberta!*

The craft snaked slowly toward them, creating hardly a murmur in the murky water. In another moment Trench had risen to his feet and was gazing with wide eyes at the outer fortress. The words of the Englishman, Carstairs, recurred to him with their full significance: "I'm interested in how far those damned things have progressed in three years!"

CARSTAIRS had described the ants as gigantic, big as a man's fist. But these things, these creatures waiting behind the breastworks, were as massive and as savage as pumas! Trench could see them pacing back and forth, back and forth, with machine-like regularity as they crossed the occasional open spaces. They did not move with the continuous scurrying eagerness of ordinary ants; their every action was deliberate and premeditated.

"They are ready to resist us," said a quiet voice. "I've seen ants before, Trench, and big ones, but never this kind. In addition to being monstrous in size, they seem to be endowed with brains!"

Trench turned abruptly. Behind him, staring intently at the shore, stood Professor Murgusson. The professor had evidently left his machine for an instant to come silently on deck, and now he too was studying the captured village of Badama. The *cuberta,* moving inshore under the slow impetus of the Portygee's paddle, drew nearer and nearer to the bank, until hardly ten feet of open water lay before it.

"Stop!" Murgusson said curtly. "We can't go on. If we touch the shore, God knows what they will do. Rush us, probably. We shall have to plan an organized attack."

The clumsy boat became motionless. Now, from where he stood, Trench could see the ant-things distinctly. They *were* ants, surely, but those glittering eyes and deliberate movements belonged to no species he had ever before heard of. The twin antennæ were like flexible swords, more than six feet long. Their heads were triangular in shape, and fitted with fanged jaws—jaws that seemed to be continually half open, as if waiting to crunch shut.

They moved along the breastworks with military watchfulness. Every head—and there were dozens of them—was turned toward the *cuberta.* Every eye was fixed balefully. And they kept guard with a quiet stolidity, a quiet *indifference,* that revealed their absolute confidence in their ability to turn back the two-legged things that approached them.

And then, with a sudden trembling jerk, Trench's arm flung out, pointing to the clearing beyond the barricade.

"Good God, look!" he cried hoarsely. "Look! A white man!"

Murgusson stepped forward abruptly, gasping. With tense, drawn face he stared past the row of tiger-ants and fixed his gaze on the settlement beyond. Half a dozen native huts were still standing in silent evidence of the tragedy that had emptied them. Between them ran well-beaten paths, curiously trampled by the feet of the ant dwellers. And there, standing at the end of one of the paths, framed in the doorway of the farthest hut of all, was a dishevelled white man. His arm was half lifted in a feeble salute.

For a single instant he stood there, staring at the boat. Then, as he stumbled forward with a harsh, jangling outcry, a writhing tentacle curled out of the darkness behind him and twisted about his

throat, jerking him back out of sight. From the interior of the hut came a six-legged devil, jerking the heavy door shut with one of its powerful antennæ.

Trench had stepped back in horror. The very sight of what had just happened —the sight of a white slave in the clutches of these ant-men—had sent a sickening dread through him. And Murgusson's shrill words, coming almost immediately afterward, did not lessen his nausea.

"Trench—that—that poor fellow was Doctor Lord! God help him—in the clutches of these frightful insects!"

Trench could not answer. He was barely conscious of what was going on about him. He knew, as though from a great distance, that Manuelo had drawn a knife from his belt and was crouching in the bow of the boat. And the *cuberta,* released from the restraining hold of the Portygee's rigid paddle, had drifted with a dull impact against the wooden landing.

But all this was a background for the sickly fear that gripped him. Doctor Richard Lord—lost in the jungle for two awful years—a slave in the domain of the ants! Good God! he had heard of ants that made slaves of other, smaller ants; but to come upon a tribe of hideous insects that had captured a human being and made a helpless prisoner of him——

Trench shuddered. More and more he was beginning to feel, to *know,* that these gigantic ants were no longer insects. True, they were fashioned like their tiny brethren, with six crooked legs and the customary head, thorax, and belly. But by some ghastly trick of evolution they had developed minds! They had become human creatures with the shapes of insects! They were horribles!

THE heavy jolt of the boat, as it struck the landing, brought Trench back to the danger of the movement. He felt the professor's hand touch his, and a revolver was thrust into his fingers. He heard the lurid scream of warning that spewed from the Portygee's lips. And then, across the narrow stretch of shore between landing and breastworks, came the macabre defenders of Badama.

They came in close formation, half a hundred of the uncanny monsters. Murgusson dropped to his knees in the bottom of the boat, firing into them as they advanced with uncanny swiftness. Trench stood upright, the professor's revolver in one hand and his own in the other, both guns belching flame. And as he fired, a sharp command burst from his lips.

"Away from the shore. Quick! Manuelo!"

The Portygee, stumbling forward in the bow, attempted to comply. His hands closed over the paddle and he pressed it frantically against the wooden landing with a mighty heave. His move was swift, quick enough to send the *cuberta* swirling out again into the semi-stagnant water. But it was too slow to save the unfortunate man from the first of his charging assailants.

Even as the boat shot back to safety, a huge insect sprang into the bow, a monster, three feet in height, with coiled six-foot body. A pair of whip-like tentacles lashed about the middle of the Portygee's defenseless body. With an abject moan of terror the fellow was jerked into the air, clear of the careening deck, and hurled back upon the landing.

Trench whirled about. As the maddened creature sprang toward him, a bullet from his revolver streaked into the snarling jaws. A second bullet, released as he fell backward out of reach of the flailing antannæ, buried itself in the ant's head between those glittering orbs. The thing stopped abruptly and doubled up with a sharp hiss, and began to claw at itself with its six great legs. And then a third bullet, this time from the professor's

gun, caused it to lurch sideways on the deck and lie still.

And the *cuberta* was safe. More than twenty feet of black water, sinister and opaque, lay between it and the shore; and the breach was slowly widening as the boat drifted sluggishly down-stream.

Trench and the professor stood rigid, staring. Neither spoke. Neither had any desire to stop the craft's progress. On the bank of the settlement crouched a military line of silent horrors, *waiting*.

And the Portygee—he had fallen heavily upon the landing, full in the path of the onrushing ants. Blindly he had struggled to his knees, only to have a whirling antenna whip him backward. Savage, spider-like legs had coiled about his body. Like a fly, helpless and squirming in terror, he had been dragged swiftly through the breastworks and into the settlement. With great speed he had been carried along the beaten paths directly to the prison hut which harbored that other terrified victim. And strangely enough, from the moment of his capture—from the moment that first tentacle had touched his body and jerked him back—he had uttered no outcry!

In the *cuberta*, now many hundreds of feet distant, Raould Trench moved cautiously toward the contorted body of the dead monster. He bent over it to turn it with his foot, and the professor's warning words came sharply across the deck behind him.

"Careful, Trench! The thing may be shamming. It may possess some frightful poison. Let it alone!"

Trench's foot, groping forward, was drawn back suddenly. Staring at the thing on the deck, he spoke without looking up.

"What are we to do? The Portygee—Doctor Lord—we can't leave them in this awful village. We can't go back and leave them—slaves—in a city of—ants."

But Murgusson had already begun his scheme of action. When Trench turned to face him, bewildered by the professor's failure to answer, the deck was abandoned. In the little cabin in the waist, Murgusson was bending intently over a camp-stool, fumbling with a tiny bit of mechanism.

Outside, the *cuberta* had drifted against an outjutting arm of jungle. Some few thousand yards below the clearing of horror, it hung silently against the shore, swaying lazily in the slow current.

An hour later Trench had cleared the deck. With the aid of a heavy piece of wood from the bank, he had dislodged the dead contorted body of the ant-monster and pushed it over the side into the sluggish water, where the current sucked it from sight. Now, as he stood on the narrow deck looking down at the resultant swirl below him, the professor called softly from the cabin.

"There is just one plan open to us," Murgusson said abruptly, when Trench had reached his side. "It depends entirely on the instrument I've been laboring to perfect. Look here."

Trench glanced down at the canvas-topped stool. Upon it lay a heavy wooden box—a square thing of greenish metal, sealed on all sides, with a narrow lens-like aperture in front.

"Know anything about light waves?" Murgusson demanded.

"Not much," Trench shrugged.

"You know the colors of the visible spectrum." The professor looked up with a show of impatience. "You know the range of colors from red to violet, don't you? Of course you do, man!"

"Well—I probably——"

"Colors are caused by vibrations of ether waves, Trench. But we don't know the extent of those waves, you see? And because we don't, it's natural to suppose

that an *invisible* spectrum exists, containing shorter and longer waves than the ones we're familiar with."

Trench nodded. It seemed foolish—utterly ridiculous—to stand here and listen to Murgusson's habitual scientific prattle, when so much had to be done. There was danger at hand. Awful danger. And Doctor Richard Lord, in the fiendish clutches of——

"Not all waves are light waves, Trench." Murgusson tapped a finger on the wooden box. "At one end of the great scale are the long Hertzian waves. Then waves of radiant heat, which we can measure with certain delicate instruments. Then, even shorter, are the light waves, which have a mighty range within themselves. You see——"

But Trench was not listening. He was staring at a metal cylinder which leaned against the wall, in the corner. An open packing-case lay beside it on the floor. Evidently the professor had only just opened it.

"The longest is the red," Murgusson declared. "The shortest is the ultra-violet. So we used to think. But the X-ray is even shorter. For a long time we weren't sure that it vibrated at all. It was the final achievement, destructive to sight, and to some forms of bacteria. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes—I know."

"Then look here." Murgusson pointed to the cylinder. "This is mercury vapor. Mercury vapor, Trench. You don't know what that means. And in the box"—he jerked about again and indicated the wooden box before him—"is a combination of glass prisms. Took me years to arrange them. Three right-angles at right-angles to each other. Dimensions, Trench! Third, fourth, fifth—no telling! Separate any ray I put through. When I connect the lens with that forty-pound Maxim of ours, the machine-gun is a machine, Trench. *A machine!* You don't understand. You wouldn't. Haven't studied enough. But the barrel of the Maxim is lined with more prisms. Reflectors. Death, Trench!"

The professor half turned in his seat. His eyes were afire with a fanatical glint. He peered up at his companion and laughed harshly; and as he did so, Trench saw the outline of a blue metallic thing under the table. A dismantled machine-gun. He felt a sudden sense of relief, of confidence in the man beside him. Yet even with that relief came a sense of helplessness. Murgusson was a scientist, impractical, queer-minded. In an emergency——

But Murgusson was on his feet, with his fingers locked in Trench's shoulders. He was saying curtly:

"We must find a way into the settlement and get Doctor Lord and the Portygee away. If we go back the way we came, the monsters will be awaiting us. Our only course is to creep into Badama through the jungle and find an entrance to the prison hut. Then—we must face whatever comes. Are you brave, Trench?"

Trench nodded. Without further words the professor stepped out of the cabin. Methodically he made the *cuberta* fast to the shore, to prevent its drifting farther down-stream. Then, glancing about him, he said simply:

"Come."

Climbing to the bow, he swung himself over the side and dropped on hands and knees to a huge root of red mangrove. He did not turn, then, but crawled slowly to shore and vanished in the deep reeds. There he waited until Trench reached his side. Together, in silence, they crept into the dense jungle.

LEADING the way, the professor bore straight inland, away from the river, into a stretch of black morass that had a

moment before seemed impenetrable. Here the ground underfoot was soft and sucking, filled with tiny green and black vipers that wriggled through it with amazing speed. Murgusson strode deliberately on for perhaps three hundred yards. Then, turning at right angles to the trail, he waited again for Trench to reach his side.

"From now on," he said quietly, "we'll have to be as noiseless as ghosts. God knows what faculties for hearing those devils have. If they find us here in the jungle we shall be helpless. Come—softly."

This time the professor led the way slowly and with infinite care. For two minutes he kept on, as silent as a prowling cat. Then he stopped abruptly, turned to the left, and pushed into a tangled labyrinth of creeping underbrush. And presently, through a network of huge reeds before him, lay the village of the ants.

For the first time Trench and his companion saw the interior of that domain. At the front, guarding the river shore, were the breastworks. A trench-like path followed their entire length—a path that was filled now with slow-moving, watching figures. Behind lay the open square of the village, with its few remaining huts. A maze of narrow paths crossed and recrossed it.

"They have progressed to a frightful stage," Murgusson whispered. "See—there are no signs of subterranean passages. Their minds have developed far enough to permit them to live above ground. They are no longer ants; they are animals. Animals with the brains of men."

But Trench was staring at something else. His searching eyes had located the prison hut at the end of the clearing, hardly a dozen yards distant from where the two white men crouched at the rim of the jungle. He touched the professor's arm and pointed to it grimly.

"Doctor Lord and Manuelo are there," he said. "We shall have to double back through the jungle. The hut is almost in the shadow of the trees."

Murgusson agreed silently. Together the two men moved back into the gloom and crept toward the hut. In the captured village not one of the fiendish inhabitants knew of their presence. The monsters continued to pace slowly back and forth, without any sign of excitement.

An instant later Trench stepped softly into the open, in the very shadow of the prison hut. Behind him came the professor, with drawn gun. Together they crept mutely forward. . . .

Was it an uncanny sense of hearing or of smell? Trench did not know. But before he had taken half a dozen steps forward—before he had covered half the distance to the heavy door—a sudden growling sound, almost inaudible, filled the clearing. Not one, but *every* one of the hideous creatures whirled abruptly about, facing the two intruders. Then, with awful speed, they charged across the open space.

Ten feet separated Trench and Murgusson from the door of the hut. What lay beyond that door neither of them knew, but there was no other way of escape. It was the prison hut or the jungle; and the jungle meant death—sudden, horrible death in the grip of those writhing, hungry tentacles.

As he ran, Trench jerked the revolver from his pocket. He used it only once, as he reached the door—to hurl a bullet into the frothing mouth of the first of the pack. Then, whirling about, he wrenched open the barrier and stumbled inside. Behind him, staggering backward over the sill and firing frantically as he came, followed Professor Murgusson.

It was over then, for the moment at least. Trench slammed the door shut and threw his weight against it, just as the hurtling body of one of the ant-monsters struck it from the outside. The wooden barrier quivered under the shock, but Trench's feet were braced against the uneven flooring. The creature outside thudded to the ground.

Turning abruptly, Trench took in his surroundings. Sick, dizzy, very much afraid, he clung to the door and stared; and the entire room whirled before him with its weird contents. There was Murgusson, standing in the middle of the floor, facing the door. And beyond him, in the shadow of the wall, lay two silent figures, both gazing with pitiful entreaty into Trench's face. Manuelo, the Portygee, and Doctor Richard Lord.

They were bound, but not with rope. A thin, web-like substance extended over them and around them, and they lay on the floor, completely enmeshed in its awful coils. Like flies they were, in a spider's den, stored away until their captors should be hungry. And the sight brought a feeling of intense nausea to the man who looked at them. He closed his eyes with a violent shudder. Before he could open them again, Professor Murgusson stood at his side, clutching his arm.

"We've got to get them out of here, Trench. That stuff—holding them. If we touch it, it may prove poisonous. They're not hurt. Merely bound up for safe-keeping. Slaves!"

Trench understood. Releasing the door suddenly, he went across the floor to the motionless form of the Portygee. There he dropped to his knees, only to have the man writhe away from him.

Trench stiffened, staring. He reached out again, and again the man wriggled frantically away.

"Good God," Trench muttered. "Professor! Something's wrong. Look here——"

But it was not that. There was nothing wrong with the Portygee's mind. He shook his head feverishly. His lips opened soundlessly, as if he were striving to cry out. Weakly, helplessly, he glared first at the silky web that enshrouded him, then into Trench's wide eyes.

"Poisonous?" Trench rasped suddenly.

The fellow hesitated, then nodded eagerly. Trench, with a quick move, tore a handkerchief from his shirt pocket and leaned forward again. This time he wrapped his hands before extending them; and this time Manuelo offered no protest.

The web was strong—stronger than the stoutest cord. Worse than that, it had no opening, no knot, no beginning or end. It was a single continuous thread wound around and around the unlucky fellow's body.

Trench groped for his knife. Without a word he slashed and hacked with his blade, relentlessly, taking infinite care that no part of the stuff should touch his fingers. And when he had finished at last, the deadly web lay on the floor beside him, a sickly, sinuous mass, and the Portygee, rubbing his body gingerly, stood upright.

And then Trench discovered the secret of the man's silence. With both hands Manuelo was tearing at a fine silky thread that encircled his throat and lips. A single strand it was, wound so cunningly about the man's neck and mouth that he could not utter a word. He tugged at it savagely, and a strange thing happened. His fingers, struggling with the cord, became fixed to it, rigid and immovable, much the way a man's tongue becomes frozen to cold iron.

Once again Trench used his knife, this time to sever the torturing thread that encircled the Portygee's windpipe. Again

he was careful not to touch his own fingers to it. When he had removed the web-like substance, the Portygee gasped heavily and extended his hands. The hands, still attached to the thread, were helpless until Trench's blade had freed them.

There were tears in the man's eyes then. He muttered a flow of incoherent words in his own tongue. He stared about him wildly. Seeing the mass of sinister web on the floor, he pointed to it and seized Trench's arm.

"It is horrible!" he cried. "No, no, no—it is not poison. It sticks! If you had touched it with your naked hands, you would be like a butterfly in the web of a spider. It comes from their awful bodies, and they spin it out with their legs——"

Trench looked down and shuddered. Then quickly he turned to the professor, to find Murgusson assisting the second victim to his feet. And that second unfortunate, Doctor Lord, was struggling weakly to speak.

"Seventeen—months—Murgusson. Seventeen months I've been here. I came upon the place by accident. They seized me. I—I haven't spoken a word—in all that time. They bound my throat with their terrible gossamer and made me dumb. Each night they wrap my body up like a dead fly and leave me here. Each morning they release me and lead me into the village to slave for them."

Doctor Lord lifted both clenched fists in a sudden surge of rage.

"It was I who built that damned barricade on the river front! It was I who made the paths of this infernal place. It was I who did everything! Everything!" He lapsed into sudden silence. Then, helplessly: "Twice I've had the fever and lived through it—worked it out of my system because they wouldn't let me die. God, it has been horrible!"

Trench and Murgusson stared in silence. The Portygee muttered under his breath. Doctor Lord clutched heavily at his throat, as if unable to realize the power of speech. Leaning for support against the wall, he said huskily:

"When you first came this morning, they were leading me out to labor. I shouted to you. God knows how I found the voice, but the effort nearly strangled me. I rushed forward. Then they dragged me back again; and I've been here, wrapped like a mummy, ever since. Each day they bring me some carrion from the jungle—some carcass half eaten by worms and crawling things. They release me while I eat it. They leave me alone here then, and—and——"

He stumbled to the center of the room. "Look!"

Doctor Lord dropped to his knees and tugged at a section of the rotten board floor. It came up slowly under the pull of his fingers. Came up and away, revealing a black aperture that led down into —nothing.

"Every day while I was free I worked on it," he sobbed. "It was agony. I feared every moment they would come in and discover me. Then, God knows what fiendish torture they would have inflicted. It—it is almost finished—now."

"A tunnel!" Trench, too, was suddenly down on his knees, peering into the gaping hole.

"Yes, a tunnel. It leads into the thickest part of the jungle where they will not discover us. In another day or two I should have completed it and made my escape. Then I should have fought my way through the jungle on foot, keeping close to the river, until I reached some human habitation. I should have——"

"Have died in the attempt," Murgusson finished simply.

Trench was still on his knees, feeling

with his arm deep in the opening. Professor Murgusson had stepped quietly to the door of the hut, beside Manuelo, and was peering intently through a crack in the boards. When he turned again to face his companions, his lips were set in a thin, anxious line.

"Waiting for us," he said. "The whole murderous tribe of them, pacing back and forth in the clearing, all watching this place as if it might suddenly jump and run away from them. Insects, with terrible bodies and cunning brains. What an unholy combination!"

"They are swift as light with their six legs," Doctor Lord mumbled. "I have seen them. Some of them, the workers, can jump nearly thirty feet. They have a queen who commands them, and soldiers and workers, like—like the white ants of Africa. If they are not destroyed, they will eventually work their terrible way down the Amazon, over the whole of South America. Then perhaps over the whole civilized world. They multiply at the rate of five hundred a year. When I came here, the entire tribe numbered about three hundred. Now there are more than a thousand of the dread things. And there would be more—many more—but they fight among themselves to the death."

Murgusson left his place at the door and came slowly forward. Already Trench had dropped on his stomach and wormed into the narrow tunnel. His voice came faintly back from the inside, calling out that he had reached the end of the passage and was digging an outlet.

"It is narrow," Doctor Lord said quietly. "Each day, after I had scraped another foot of it, I had to carry the loose earth back here and pack it under the floor where they would not discover it. At one time the hut stood on gnarled stilts above the ground. Now I have packed all that space in. They are uncanny, and their mentalities are nearly as far advanced as our own. If they found loose soil on the floor of the hut, or guessed what I was doing, they would have——"

He shuddered and stepped back abruptly. Manuelo, at the door, said softly:

"They are still waiting."

AN HOUR must have passed after that. Twice Trench emerged from the tunnel and whispered words of encouragement. Murgusson stood impatiently at the opening, talking to himself. Manuelo kept watch. Doctor Lord paced back and forth, back and forth, occasionally bursting into incoherent speech.

And then Trench appeared for the last time, caked with brown earth and crawling wearily.

"It is through," he said with an effort. "I've finished it. The farther end opens in the jungle floor, thirty feet from the clearing. Come!"

And at the same moment, with the fate of four men in the balance, Manuelo gave the alarm. Even as Doctor Lord disappeared into the passage with Trench groping behind him, the Portygee, who had been standing strangely silent at the barrier, sprang suddenly back into the room.

"Quickly!" he cried. "They are coming—in a rush!"

Only Professor Murgusson was left in the hut with him. The others had vanished in the bowels of the earth, crawling to safety. In a flash Murgusson tore a loose board from the floor and ran to the door. Savagely he wedged the board against it—wedged it so solidly that only a heavy shock from without could have dislodged it. Already the Portygee had scurried into the tunnel. And now, with a swift glance at the onrushing horde outside, Murgusson followed him.

Only for an instant did the professor hesitate. Only long enough to pull the loose section of the floor back into place

above him, hiding the mouth of the passage. Then, crawling quickly along the subterranean corridor, he left the prison shack behind him. The last sound he heard, as he struggled through the passage, was the crash of timbers as the ancient door of the hut hurtled inward.

THE darkness was impenetrable. Only the sounds of the fugitives ahead of him kept the professor from crawling head foremost into a wall of earth. There was no sign of light—only silence behind him and the scraping of human bodies ahead. And then, after many minutes of groping, Murgusson found himself at the other end. Groping to his knees, then to his feet, he stood erect in the midst of a tangle of underbrush. The village of the ant horde lay some thirty feet distant, as Trench had said. At his side stood the three men who had preceded him.

But there was something else—something far more important than the men who stood near him. For in the narrow thirty-foot space between village and tunnel came the entire horrible population of Badama!

Murgusson did not wait to study them. He whipped about abruptly, seizing the arm of the man nearest him.

"Run for it!" he screamed. "The boat! If we can make it——"

And then he was racing through the jungle, leading the way. This time he did not notice the sucking morass underfoot; he heard only the thrashing sound of many hundreds of savage bodies following him. And yet it was the very swamp, with its sucking mud, that gave him a chance for life. The six-legged fiends behind him could not race through it. Their flailing legs, with narrow, pointed feet, sank deep into the mire and found no footing.

After that it was an even race with death. What was more important, the race was a short one, and the great strength of the pursuers gave them less advantage. They gained, but they gained slowly. Murgusson, the first to reach the side of the moored *cuberta,* was twenty feet ahead of the first monster. And Doctor Lord, stumbling along on the support of Trench's shoulder, was less than five feet from the groping tentacles that twisted savagely forward to seize him.

Murgusson did not look back. Like a cat, in spite of his bulk, he was across the deck and into the narrow cabin. There, in a single movement, he jerked the little wooden box into position and dragged forth the machine-gun. His fingers fumbled with the attachment.

At the same moment the Portygee reached his side. Behind him, clambering awkwardly into the swaying boat, came Trench and the doctor.

"Quick! Help me!" The professor's cry was little more than a gasp as he pulled the heavy machine into place, pointing the muzzle of the Maxim straight out over the side of the craft. He strained at it frantically. Wrenched at it, tugging and swearing hideously. Then his sensitive finger leaped down at last to press the control. And then——

The leader of the unearthly pack—evidently the queen of them all, judging from its enormous size and viciousness—gained the deck in a single mighty bound. Its writhing antennæ shot out, just as Murgusson's finger pressed home—shot out and hovered for a fraction of an instant over Trench's throat. The roar of Trench's revolver, fired straight into the snarling jaws, came simultaneously with the blinding streamer of silver light from the professor's instrument.

The gigantic ant, poised over the unlucky Trench, stiffened suddenly as if an electric shock had passed through it. A

single hiss of agony whined from its gaping mouth. Then, like a grotesque, unfinished photograph left in the sun, it faded.

Trench and the others, safely out of the radius of the professor's infernal instrument, fell back in horror at the sight. On the deck, where the monster had crouched, lay a thin spray of greenish slime—nothing more. And on shore, where the great horde of demons had surged forward to follow their queen, a silver sheen covered every living thing. For hundreds of yards in each direction it was the only visible thing—and from the center of it, as from the pits of an inferno, came the death cries of the monster horde.

The professor stretched slowly to his feet and stumbled forward. As he stood on the deck, watching the glare of silver, the sheen slowly faded. It turned jet-black, then grayish green, and then, like a thick milky fog it broke and became nothing. A huge empty area lay spread out on the shore, extending back as far as the eye could follow. Mud, slime—nothing else. No trees, no underbrush, no animal life. Nothing but empty morass, tainted by the nauseating slimy substance that marked the remains of the ant invaders.

Murgusson laughed, very softly. Entering the cabin again, he methodically disconnected the machine-gun and pushed it under the table. As he set the little wooden box back in its place, he said evenly:

"If you are ready, all of you, we can be starting back. It is finished. Utterly finnished."

THREE days later, on the veranda of the hotel in Alemquer, Raould Trench came face to face with the Englishman, Carstairs.

"It seems a shame," the Englishman said thoughtfully, "that you were forced to exterminate the ant-men. I'm wondering just how far they might have progressed in the next ten years or so. Think of it! Savage insects with bodies like dynamos and minds to control them! In another few years they might have begun a concerted campaign to conquer the civilized world, making slaves of every human who resisted them! I wonder."

Trench walked away, saying nothing. There was nothing he could say. He alone knew that Carstairs' casual prophecy might come true. He alone, of the four men who had returned, knew that the ant-horde would be heard from again.

For when the *cuberta* had snaked into the river, three days ago, to begin the long journey down-stream, Trench had stared back with sudden premonition at the abandoned settlement of Badama. And there, barely visible behind the grim breastworks, a silent line of squat figures had been pacing mechanically back and forth, back and forth, on guard.

The ant-men, rushing to the attack, had left some of their number behind to defend their domain. In time those few would multiply. Their development would go on—and on—and on.

Trench, thinking suddenly of the future—the distant future—shuddered violently and muttered under his breath:

"There will come a time—a time of horror—when——"

But he could not finish.

The Thought-Devil

By A. W. CALDER

The story of a writer of gangster tales whose villainous creation threatened to loose a dreadful horror upon the world

"I DON'T dare go insane!" Ronald Ganly almost shouted at me. Truly enough, his eyes, though shining, were alight with a fighting gleam. His face was shockingly gaunt, but there seemed no sign of the madman about him.

"Because your boss knows that we have been friends since we believed in ghosts, he sends you up here to get the story." Ron calmed slightly as he talked. "But he won't get any story from me that he can print."

"How the devil did you do it, though?" I tried to drag my friend back to the amazing thing which had spurred the city editor into chasing me hotfoot to interview the famous author, Ronald Ganly.

Last night a terrible raid had taken a daring bandit into the strongroom of one of the city's greatest department stores. The invader had shot his way out, heedlessly killing even bystanders on the street, and had escaped with over $50,000 in bills.

That was big news, worthy of the largest type the foundry could supply, but a second shock had trembled our newspaper office. Even as the special writers were rattling out their leads, it was discovered that the day's short-story feature gave the exact details of the bloody attack on the department store. That story had been in type hours before the crime occurred; it had been in our office fifteen hours before the outrage. It had been written by Ronald Ganly, the master thrill-creator, and it had been written a day before the crime.

Nothing can shock the city editor of a metropolitan daily. Taking only time to see that the main details in Ganly's story fitted the crime, the boss had ordered a special lead for the feature and a front-page send-off. Six hours after the crime, our paper was on the street with an exclusive description of the deed written by America's greatest detective-story writer.

I watched this prolific writer, wondering what supernatural foresight had given him the details of the horrible story before it was enacted in bloody reality. And the vicious sadism of the bandit who had killed in blood-lust abandon had reminded me of the perverted genius of murder who was the sinister center of Ronald Ganly's recent stories. We newspapermen could never hope to make our reports of last night's wholesale butchery ring as true as this author's tales.

Ronald Ganly was the product that only our age of universal demand for thrilling literature and our instant facilities for supplying it could create. He wrote at least one short story a day, specializing in blood-curdling, super-criminal and super-gangster themes. Even more hair-raising than his fast-acting plots was his uncanny ability to make his characters live. A company which had been broadcasting dramatized versions of his stories had been petitioned in thousands of letters to change its hour, as the plays kept the listeners in a waking nightmare if they were

"I sprang to grab him, but he pushed me back with a madman's strength and pulled at the drawer."

heard too close to bedtime. Yet to see Ganly's fine-featured face and his large, imaginative eyes, one could hardly believe that he produced such terrific stories.

"Oh, I'll tell you all I can," Ganly answered my last question. "You may think I am crazy and God knows I won't blame you. Anybody who hadn't known me for as long as you would want to see me in Bellevue for observation. Your editor won't be able to print a word I say."

"For the love of Pete, say it!" My impatience sharpened my curiosity.

"Do you know who committed that outrage last night?" Ron paused in his nervous pacing of the room. "Vipra Honelli!"

"Oh, come, Ron! That's the villain in your story, yes. He's the villain in a hundred of your stories, I suppose, and practically a national figure, but there is really no such person."

"Are you sure there is no such person? There never was, I know. I created Vipra out of all the loathsome things I abhor. He's all the bestial, blood-lusting, mad essence that I distilled from a thousand pirates and gunmen, scum of the gutter, adding superhuman intelligence to make him thrilling to readers. He was merely a character for my stories, but now," Ron paused to lean over me, "I'm very much afraid Vipra has come alive!"

"Come alive!" Something in the tremendously sane gravity of Ron's eyes made me consider such an impossibility.

"It's not so impossible as you think,"

Ganly read my thoughts, which must have been obvious. "All the written history of mankind, and the unwritten legends of voodoism or stranger beliefs, give hints of similar things.

"Look." Ron waved his hand toward his bookshelves. "There are over a hundred bound collections of my short stories. God knows why they have been so popular! Today they appear daily in hundreds of newspapers throughout the country. They are in the movies and millions see them nightly. They're on the radio and nobody can count the listeners. And today the big majority of them feature my villain, Vipra Honelli!

"Do you know much about the power of mass suggestion? History is full of instances when the power of a number of minds concentrated on one thought has produced a very tangible result. Christopher Columbus himself may have discovered this country purely through the energy created by thousands of Europeans wishing for easier commerce with Asia. The thought was vivid in the minds of many people. It produced a compass from one inventor and a gracious softness in Isabella.

"Now go a little further afield. In voodooism it is possible to kill a man by doing nothing more than concentrating thought on his death. Usually this is accompanied by tricks to attack the thoughts of all believers to the pending death of the victim. I tell you, it is impossible to say what can be accomplished by focusing the minds of the multitude on one object. Even in the Christian religion we find congregations praying for rain."

"But Vipra!" I expostulated. "How could he come alive? And why haven't such widely-read authors as Dickens materialized their characters, if it is possible?"

"Because only in the modern age have we the means of creating a tremendous audience throughout the country at the same second. In addition to that, Vipra has been the central figure of a series of stories. Think of the millions who have had this fiend visualized in their minds at once! Admitting only the smallest division of energy thrown out by one brain, figure the tremendous total of force those millions of generators would create!"

"How can you know that last night was not just a coincidence?"

"Because I have been waiting and fearing just this thing. I tried in my last half-dozen stories to write 'Finis' to Vipra's career, but I simply couldn't do it. Plot the story as I might, it fell flat unless the unholy villain was left triumphant at the last. This outside influence has been growing stronger lately and Vipra has been forcing me to let him wallow in more and more blood. Of course, it has not been as definite as all that, or in sheer terror I would have thrown my typewriter out of the window long ago, but I have been made surer each day that the character was getting stronger than the author. See the trouble Conan Doyle had finishing his Sherlock Holmes hero."

VIVIDLY in my mind I saw Ron's infamous character as I had so often seen him in theaters or visualized him from magazine, newspaper or radio stories. Even as I pictured that heartless madman and thought of his satirical, yellowed eyes, I had the shock of feeling a low, cruel laugh inside my head. I shuddered at the unearthly sensation. Was this horror actually being unloosed on the world?

"Good Lord, Ron!" I cried; "you've got me going, too!"

"Then you believe me?"

"Yes, forgive me, but I do!"

"Right!" Ron's haggard face seemed to brighten as though he had dropped at least half of his load. "You'll keep me

from going crazy, if you can understand it, too. Do you realize what this means? This appalling piling-up of mental force from millions of readers has given life to the dreadful, unrestrained creature I fashioned in my own mind. So far, I believe, he can work only through my mind, having no brain of his own. I don't dare write or think consecutively of him again. If I go insane, he will do whatsoever my wild brain may suggest. He might even take control if my mind gets disordered. You and I have to think up some way of throwing him back into the limbo from which I and my readers brought him."

"But Ron," I objected, "how can this Vipra achieve physical effects? The bandit last night was seen. He carried a very material pistol that dealt death, and he escaped with bank-notes. Your creation is nothing but an intangible intelligence."

"That's the most easily explained part of it all," Ronald said wearily. "Vipra is a purely mental and emotional force, but what prevents him taking charge of a convenient body?

"Think of the times during the day that you practically drop all conscious control of yourself, while your habits and subconscious mind attend to your physical reactions. You roll out of bed automatically in the morning when the alarm rings, and you dress yourself with your mind either fogged with sleep or a million miles away on the day's problems. If some other force could grasp control of your body for half an hour while you were day-dreaming, you might even not know what you were doing."

"But that means some actual person did the shooting last night?"

"Exactly. No doubt the police will eventually discover a very much bewildered man whose finger pulled the trigger. It was Vipra who did the killing, though—Vipra, whose plans were made with my brain and whose energy comes from the suggestion of ten million readers—who has no use for the money he has taken, because his fiendish delight is in torture and bloodshed alone."

THE shrilling of a doorbell ended further conversation. I heard Ron's man speaking to somebody in the hall. Without ceremony, a figure swung open the library door and entered.

"Good morning, Bill," the newcomer said to me. "Might have expected to find you here. Surprized at seeing me?"

"Not so very," I admitted, "but you're not going to get what you want."

I turned to Ron, who had been looking from one to the other of us in puzzlement. "This is Detective Smart, Ronald Ganly," I introduced. "He never bothers with such formalities as being announced."

"Good morning, sir," acknowledged Ron. "I have a couple of things to do if you want to talk with Bill here."

"Thanks, Mr. Ganly," replied the detective, "but my business is with you. If you can spare the time, the Chief would like to ask you a few questions."

"Ask me? What about?"

"He'll tell you if you will come down to his office with me. He thinks you can help him clear up a couple of points about that affair last night."

"Why me?" Ron eyed the detective narrowly.

"Because you seem to know more about it than any one else. You had details in your story that we didn't discover until after the newspapers were on the street. And Bill's boss," nodding to me, "tells us that your story was written before the affair happened. The Chief recognizes that your time is valuable, Mr. Ganly, but he must insist on an immediate interview."

"And if I refuse, you'll take me!" Ron

finished bitterly. "In that case we might as well start." Ringing for his man, he added, "Coming along, Bill?"

"Sorry, this interview will be private," Smart put in.

"Then I'll see you later. We have to plan some offensive campaign. Although," Ron concluded thoughtfully, taking his hat, "it may be as well if the police keep me with them for a few days."

RON left with Detective Smart, and it wasn't until evening that I learned that the police had held a similar view. "Ronald Ganly was being held for further questioning." No doubt but that he had told them the truth as he saw it, but intangible horrors can't be handcuffed.

Naturally, I hotfooted down to the station just as quickly as I could. There was the usual reluctance to let a reporter get at so important a prisoner before the police themselves were finished with him, but Ron was one of the most notable personages this station had ever held. His lawyer had already been at work and had created enough uneasiness among the officials to gain me an unwilling entrance.

"They can't hold you here!" I told Ron. "There are a dozen loopholes that your lawyer can open in their argument. It might have been a coincidence. Or your story might have inspired any one of the people who read it on the way to printing. The typesetter or proof-reader in our own office could have gone out and acted your story after he had read it."

"I know," Ron smiled sadly, "but I think I'm better off here where I can't be tempted to write. As long as Vipra can't get my brain working for him, he is impotent."

"Are you sure about him, Ron? They've arrested and tentatively identified as the murderer a man who was found running the streets a hopeless madman. Isn't it possible that——"

I halted in confusion as Ron turned his face to me. His haggard cheeks seemed cut away from the eyesockets, and in those large, troubled eyes I read the agony of a soul tortured by the terrible certainty of its Frankenstein monster.

"We've got to end it!" he cried, jumping past my half-formed question. "Don't you see it's driving me mad? Once in possession, hell itself will break loose!"

With an effort he dragged himself back into control. "I have had my lawyer send notices to all newspapers, magazines and radio stations prohibiting the production of any of my stories," he continued more calmly. "If I can shut off the source of this monster's energy, he'll cease to exist. And, of course, I'll never write another line about him."

The warden interfered at that moment and I had to leave Ganly alone in his battle with the impalpable demon his very popularity had created.

BACK at the office I came in for another stormy session with the editor, who had just received his notice from Ron's lawyer. Our newspaper had a contract for three Ganly stories a week and our circulation department knew how valuable they were. I explained to the editor that even my friendship with Ron could in no way influence him, that he would prefer to pay for a broken contract rather than write another Vipra Honelli story. All other publications were cancelled in the same way, I pointed out.

That last reflection helped soothe the boss, although he finished with the disturbing remark that one of the more daring papers would put on a ghost-writer to continue the series and damn the consequences.

We published both morning and evening editions, which kept me too busy all the next day to see Ron. Then the fol-

lowing evening brought another of those grisly wholesale murders which seem inevitable to our civilization and are the sensational newspaper's blood. Though details seemed to be lacking, it developed that one of the guards in an armored truck had suddenly run amuck. He had shot his companion in cold blood as they rode within their steel car and then forced the driver to carry him into the country. Description of the callous murder came chiefly from the driver, who was sure he had escaped with his own life only by jumping from the moving car the minute he had been commanded to slow down. The fact that there was no money in the armored truck at the time pointed to insanity.

I finished with my end of the report about dawn. Not knowing what brain storms the city editor might get during the day, I decided to grab something to eat and shoot up for a quick visit with Ron. It was an ungodly hour to be paying calls even at a police station. I figured that Ron's lawyer would have disturbed the officers of the law sufficiently by this time to make them dispense with a few regulations as amends for their holding such an important man. The burden that was held from the world only by the walls of Ganly's sanity had weighed on my mind all night.

When I finally won through the barriers to Ron, his appearance hit me like a blow. Before he had looked haggard; now he looked demoralized. His whole frame drooped, his hands clenched and opened unceasingly, his face muscles twitched. His eyes, with great, black circles under them, had lost their fire and were dull with resignation to horror.

"Tell me!" he cried without wasting a second for greeting, "what has happened?"

"I'm the one to ask you that, Ron," I returned. "You look as though you had been through hell."

"It has been hell! But tell me quickly, man! What happened during the night?"

I couldn't believe that Ron was going insane. Had his terrible, invisible enemy already broken down the resistance of that keen mind? I tried to laugh him into a better humor.

"Nothing unusual for me," I told him with a grin. "Just covering our great and good city's latest murdering."

"What was it?" Ron's words hissed from tight lips and his eyes narrowed before some overwhelming horror.

"It had nothing to do with you, Ron. For the love of Pete, buck up! Because a guard in an armored car wants to run amuck, why should you——"

"Oh, my God!" Ron cried in such anguish that the prison guard jumped to watch him. "That devil!"

"You don't even know the man!" I grabbed his arm. "Don't go off your head, old boy. You've had too much of this prison. We'll get you out and away on a trip."

Ron wheeled on me so fiercely that his arm almost threw me off balance. For a second his eyes glared into mine; then they dulled to their former apathetic horror.

"Look!" he cried. With the prison guard watching his movement in surprize, Ron dug into his inner pocket. His hand came out clenching a sheaf of prison correspondence paper. "Look at that!"

I took up the note-paper and saw that it was covered with fine writing.

"No need to read it," Ron told me, sinking into his hopeless monotone. "It's the complete story of last night's massacre of an armored truck's crew. Oh, there may be differences! It's written around the idea of a man plotting for years to

become a guard solely in order that he could rob the truck. Needless to say, the man is Vipra and he took control of whatever body did the shooting last night."

"But my Lord, Ron, you told me you wouldn't write another line about Vipra!" Had the man gone mad?

"Wouldn't write another line!" Ron laughed bitterly. "That was written in my sleep on some paper left here by the prison officials. Written in my sleep! Now I can't even sleep any more! There is only one way to get at Vipra before he finally takes over my mind completely." The words dropped so deeply into despair that his sentence ended in almost a groan.

"Ron!" I cried suddenly, hope springing with a new idea, "don't you see that your writing this story while you were in prison, before it happened in fact, frees you from the suspicion of the other?"

Ron hardly lifted his head to answer. "Frees me? What of it? Even if we could persuade the police that this writing was done before you came here, hot from the scene of action, and then persuade them that I didn't help plot the crime before I was imprisoned, what then? They would free me, yes. They will today or tomorrow anyway.

"I tell you," here his voice sank to a whisper that the guard could barely overhear, "there's only one way out of this mess. My mind must be kept from my terrible creation. If we can't keep it from my brain, we can make that brain useless."

"No, Ron, never that! We'll find some way out." I was determined that I'd see Vipra ruling the world before I'd see this friend of mine in a suicide's grave.

"There's no other way, I'm afraid. And it has to be before the demon saps my will-power."

"But Ron, isn't he starving this very minute? Didn't you tell me that cutting off his source of energy would dry him up? You've forbidden publishers and broadcasters to use your stuff."

"And my lawyer tells me that some of them are going ahead in spite of it. Of course, he's getting out an injunction, but the law moves slowly. Vipra," he finished grimly, "moves fast. I must move faster."

"There must be some other way," I insisted desperately.

"Wish I knew it! No, there's only one sure cure, and I'll take it the minute I'm free. Imagine that horrible thing taking control of my mind! Who knows what he might do? He has absolutely no fear, no moral scruples; nothing but a devilish delight in cruelty and a greed for blood. Nobody will be immune. He will start a reign of hell on earth. No doubt they will eventually corner my body and kill it, but by then he may have gathered strength enough to live without it. To settle in some other convenient brain and work through another body. Perhaps even to live as disembodied Evil. To spread horror, terror and destruction for all eternity. No, I must answer for what I loosed on the earth."

"Couldn't you continue writing about him, modifying his character slowly?"

"I tried that the minute I suspected his presence. When I tried to give him a belated spark of kindliness, the words fell absolutely flat. They simply wouldn't carry conviction to my readers, and without mass suggestion we can't touch him. There's only one way out."

The guard came forward at that moment. I made a sudden last plea.

"Ron, promise you'll do nothing until I have seen you again!"

"If I dare wait that long," he nodded, but no ray of hope lightened those horror-filled eyes.

I HAD to leave him that way, a man self-doomed, the creator of a Frankenstein monster, but one ready to give himself in sacrifice for his unwitting blunder.

Ron's public had idolized its writer of blood-curdling tales. Never had he deserved their devotion so much as today when he prepared to die for them. He would blow out his brains before he would yield them to his terrible offspring.

Back to the office I hurried. Ron's words had given me an idea. It was the wildest kind of an outside chance, but I had to act on it. I nearly got on my knees to the city editor before I could make him see it my way. What finally clinched the argument, I think, was the fact that another paper had put on a ghost-writer to continue its Ganly story series and the boss welcomed a slap back at it.

That gave me a point to the story I told later to the city editor of another newspaper, another man who envied the circulation being built up by a competitor's flagrant defiance of Ron's veto. He, too, finally agreed, making me promise him some unusual feature concessions on Ron Ganly's part. I spent the rest of the morning in news syndicate offices.

It was nearly noon when I returned to my own shop, just in time to get a telephone call from Ronald Ganly. He was out of prison and prepared to sacrifice himself.

"I'd like to see you before I go away," Ron told me over the wire.

"Wait at your apartment for me," I besought him. "I'll be there at three."

So Ganly's lawyer had pried him from prison! With Ron's hopeless threat of the morning still ringing in my ears, I knew what that would mean. He was determined to cheat this gruesome concentration of evil that he had conjured from his own writing, and he had decided that only through destroying himself could he succeed. Nor would he lose a single minute, now that he was free, for fear that his mind would go first. I prayed for at least time to try my only weapon.

Ron was shaking like a dope-addict when I was admitted to his apartment. The lines and hollows had eaten deeper into his face since morning. His hand trembled as I took it. However, the dull fixity with which his eyes had looked upon horror had vanished. Now they were calm with the resolve of the purpose behind them. The unimaginable contrast between the terror-engraved face and the quiet eyes told of the terrible, silent battle Ron had been fighting.

"It's good-bye," Ron told me, even his voice shaking. "I'm leaving the apartment in half an hour."

"No, no!" I cried. "I've got something to beat down Vipra. To knock him back into nothingness. But, Ron, I've got to have time! Give me five hours!"

"Nothing is any use now, I'm afraid. Thanks for your efforts, but only one thing will do any good."

"Not yet, Ron! Look at this!" I spread out before him the newspapers that I had gathered that afternoon. The boss, thanks to his grudge against the faking sheets, had spread my story on the front page with a double-column head. In fat, black type half a million people would see:

VIPRA HONELLI DIES

and would read that the arch-criminal of Ronald Ganly's stories was in fact a real man whose death had just been reported.

"You see, Ron," I pleaded, "we'll cut off his source of strength and turn his own energy against him. There are more reports, too. One other front-page story in the city and I got it on the syndicate wires. There'll be paragraphs all over the country in this evening's paper."

"My God, possibly it will work! The

only thing that could reach Vipra is such a concentration of suggestion. But such a terrible risk to wait!"

"Five million people will think of his death tonight," I encouraged Ron. "Five million blows at his energy. Give me until eight o'clock!"

Ron bowed his head for a moment. I saw sweat gather in the deep lines of his face. A low moan bespoke his mental anguish. Finally, "Until eight, then, but you must promise one thing. I don't dare go insane! If I go mad, you must shoot me dead immediately. There's a pistol in that drawer. You promise?"

I took one deep breath. If my plan failed, Ron must die. If the demon Vipra battered down Ron's mind in less than four hours, I must be the executioner. Then I, too, would be captured and killed by the police. Two lives in a desperate gamble against such a horror as the world had never seen.

"I promise!" I told Ron.

A flicker of relief shone from his eyes; then suddenly Ron jumped to his feet and strode around the room.

"My God, he's driving me crazy!" he screamed. His fingers clawed at his skull, digging through his hair until the blood flowed from the scalp. It took him nearly five minutes to control himself; then he moaned, "Your newspapers are stirring him up. He's making a desperate bid to break down my reason."

I SOOTHED Ron as best I could until the next paroxysm shook him and sent him screaming around the room. I can't describe the terrible hours as attack after attack drove Ron to terrible fruitless attempts to dodge the battering in his brain. As evening darkened and millions of people opened newspapers to glance idly at the news that Vipra was dead, though they must have puzzled over the item, their thought waves sent the disembodied devil into a frenzy that made him claw desperately at Ron's brain.

Ganly ramped around the apartment, tearing at his clothes and his head. As his torture mounted, he rolled his head against the wall, biting his under-lip until his jaw was smeared with blood, scraping until his fingernails were red. His eyes screwed tight shut one second and bulged from their sockets the next. Even during the brief respites when Vipra withdrew for another charge, Ron moaned in agony.

It was after seven when I realized sickeningly that each of Ron's attacks lasted longer and left him weaker. The rush of newspaper selling on the streets of our city had passed. Now we had no defense but the belated readers and those in other cities, where our story would be published in smaller form and miss the notice of many.

Ron was standing in the middle of the room. His whole body shook as though he were a hanged man in his last convulsions. His eyes were closed and his head rolled in agony around his shoulders.

Suddenly he straightened enough to walk. I heard his moan, "It's the end!" and he staggered toward the drawer that held the pistol.

"No, Ron!" I shouted, springing to grab him by the shoulder. He pushed me back as though he had already a madman's strength and pulled at the drawer.

I leaped on his back and curved my arm around his neck, thrusting my elbow under his chin in a strangle hold. Helplessly, he clawed back at me.

"Give me five minutes more, Ron! Steady, boy! I have an idea for the knockout blow."

With my free hand I reached for the telephone. It seemed an eternity before I could get through to the broadcasting studio. A world-famous orchestra was

on the air tonight over a national hook-up and I knew the leader. There would be millions listening in, millions of new thought waves to crash down on Vipra.

It took me an age to reach the orchestra leader. He was just going on, he explained. Hurriedly I begged him as a friend of a newspaper man who had done him many good turns to speak one line for me tonight. He agreed and I dropped the phone to carry Ron to a chair, switching on the radio as we passed it.

Ron eyed me dully. "You promised," he mumbled.

"And I'll do it!" I swore. "But wait five minutes. We're winning, Ron. Fight back like the devil himself this time! Hold out for five minutes!"

Music flooded from the radio. As a popular dance number ended, I felt Ron stiffen in another convulsion. "Fight!" I whispered. "Fight!"

Then it came. From the loud speaker streamed the tones of the announcer, urbanely and consciously amusing, joking with millions of listeners while Ron struggled against his mightiest onslaught.

"You've read about the death of Vipra Honelli, no doubt," the voice remarked in the careful articulation of a radio announcer. "Since the villain Vipra is dead, we will next play our gayest tune to celebrate his death."

Three times he had said "Death."

While the famous orchestra poured out its gay notes, Ron suddenly relaxed in my arms.

"It's gone!" he breathed. "Oh, thank God, it's gone!"

He slid unconscious against me. He had fainted, but he would awaken sane.

Millions of radio listeners had reflected the thought. Vipra was dead.

Night Specters

By KIRKE MECHEM

The wind awakes me and I grow aware
  Of muffled croakings where the crow's nest swings,
  Of hoarse and sullen midnight murmurings
Among the shadowy branches swaying there.
I hear the great-eyed owl upon the air
  Sweeping the affrighted earth on phantom wings;
  Far down the field his eery hooting rings;
Fear-struck below the moon crouch mouse and hare.
Unmortal shapes ride restless through the night:
  Specters of human passions, that awake
Their apprehensive keepers, pallid, white:
  Gaunt-pinioned forms to haunt the soul's dark brake,
Croaking like crows perched in the ghostly light,
  Floating like owls where fear-tossed branches shake.

The Devil's Bride

By SEABURY QUINN

An amazing tale of murder, human sacrifice, and the infamous Black Mass—an eldritch story of devil-worship

The Story Thus Far

BEAUTIFUL Alice Hume vanished during the rehearsal for her wedding, in the presence of her fiancé and a group of friends including her mother, her family physician, Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, and Trowbridge's eccentric associate, the French physician-detective, Doctor Jules de Grandin. The little Frenchman discovered traces of a yellow powder which, he explained to Trowbridge, was *bulala-gwai,* the "little death" used by natives of the Congo to produce temporary paralysis. Alice, he declared, had been abducted while the wedding party was rendered unconscious by *bulala-gwai.*

De Grandin also believed that the disappearance was connected with a girdle of tanned human skin that Alice had worn. The girl told him that the belt was known as "the luck of the Humes" and had been in the family a long time.

He found a concealed document in the family Bible, written by Alice's ancestor, David Hume, and relating how he had been sold as a slave to the devil-worshipping Yezidees, had rescued the daughter of their chief from becoming the "bride of Satan," had married her, and later brought her to America.

Despite a sentence in the old manuscript warning Hume's descendants that an attempt might some time be made to "bring home" one of the daughters of his line, Alice's mother refused to admit any connection between the Yezidee legend and her daughter's disappearance. But that very night Mrs. Hume was found murdered by a strangling-cord in her own boudoir.

De Grandin, aided by Inspector Renouard of the French *Sureté* and Baron Ingraham, known as "Hiji," of the British secret service, raided the devil-worshippers during a performance of the infamous Black Mass, rescued Alice Hume, killed one of the priests of the cult and captured another.

The priest of the cult was electrocuted after conviction on a charge of murder; but several days after the execution Alice was stolen from her fiancé, John Davisson, by a man who called a pack of wolves to his aid. Davisson identified the kidnapper as the Red Priest—*the same man they had seen put to death in prison a few days before!*

Led by clues left by Alice, de Grandin and his friends attacked the stronghold of devil-worshippers, but while they were killing off the wolves that guarded the place, the abductors made their escape by airplane, taking Alice with them, and eventually making their way to Africa. De Grandin and his friends prepared to follow them.

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23. *Pursuit*

THERE was no scarcity of offered labor when we debarked at Monrovia. A shouting, sweating, jostling throng of black boys crowded round us, each member of the crowd urging his own peculiar

This story began in WEIRD TALES for February

"Something big, black and bulky crashed through the palm-tree's fronds."

excellence as a baggage-carrier in no uncertain terms. Foremost—and most vocal—was a young man in long and much soiled nightgown, red slippers and very greasy tarboosh. "Carry luggage, sar? Carry him good; not trust dam' bush nigger!" he asseverated, worming with serpentine agility through the pressing crowd of volunteers and plucking Ingraham's sleeve solicitously.

"Right; carry on, young feller," the Englishman returned, kicking his kit bag toward the candidate for portership.

"Hi-yar, nigger, this way—grab marster's duffle!" the favored one called out, and from the crowd some half-dozen nondescript individuals sprang forward, shouldered our gear and, led by the man Ingraham had engaged, preceded us at a shuffling jog-trot up the winding street toward the apology for a hotel.

Evidently Ingraham was familiar with conventions, for when we had arrived at our hotel he made no effort to distribute largess among the porters, but beckoned to the head man to remain in our room while the remainder of the gang dispersed themselves in such shade as offered in the street outside, awaiting the emergence of their leader.

The moment the door closed a startling transformation came over our chief porter. The stooping, careless bearing which marked his every movement fell from him like a cloak, his shoulders straightened back, his chin went up, and, heels clicked together, he stood erectly at attention be-

fore Ingraham. "Sergeant Bendigo reporting, sar," he announced.

"At ease," commanded Ingraham. Then: "Did you go out there?"

"Yes, O Hiji, even as you ordered, so I did. Up to the place where all of the great waters break in little streams I went, and there at the old camp where ghosts and djinn and devils haunt the night I found the tribesmen making *poro*. Also, O Hiji, I think the little leopards are at large again, for in the night I heard their drums, and once I saw them dancing round a fire while something—*wah*, an unclean thing, I think!—stewed within their pots. Also, I heard the leopard scream, but when I looked I saw no beast, only three black feller walking through a jungle path."

"U'm? Any white men there?" demanded Ingraham.

"Plenty lot, sar. No jolly end. Plenty much white feller, also other feller with dark skin, not white like Englishman or French, not black like bush boy or brown like Leoni, but funny-lookin' feller, some yeller, some brown, some white, but dark and big-nosed, like Jewish trading man. Some, I think, are Hindoos, like I see sometime in Freetown. They come trekking long time through the jungle from Monrovia, ten, twenty, maybe thirty at once, with Liberian bush boys for guide, and——"

"All right, get on with it," Ingraham prompted sharply.

"Then make killing palaver, Hiji," the young man told him earnestly. "Those bush boys come as guides; but *they not return*. They start for home, but something happen—I saw one speared from ambush. I think those white men put bad thoughts in bush men's heads. Very, very bad palaver, sar."

"What's doing up at MacAndrews'?"

"*Hou!* Bush nigger from all parts of the forest work like slaves; all time they dig and chop. Clear off the jungle, dig up old stones where ghosts are buried. I think there will be trouble there."

"No doubt of it," the Englishman concurred. Then: "Tell me, O sergeant man, was there among these strangers some one woman of uncommon beauty whom they guarded carefully, as though a prisoner, yet with reverence, as though a queen?"

"Allah!" exclaimed the sergeant, rolling up his eyes ecstatically.

"Never mind the religious exercises. Did you see the woman?"

"*Wah*, a woman, truly, Hiji, but a woman surely such as never was before. Her face is like the moon at evening, her walk like that of the gazelle, and from her lips drips almond-honey. Her voice is like the dripping of the rain in thirsty places, and her eyes—*bismillah*, when she weeps the tears are sapphires. She has the first-bloom of the lotus on her cheek, and——"

"Give over, you've been reading Hafiz or Elinor Glyn, young feller. Who's the leader of this mob?"

"*Wallah*"—Sergeant Bendigo passed his fingers vertically across his lips and spat upon the floor—"he is called Bazarri, Hiji, and verily he is the twin of Satan, the stoned and the rejected. A face of which the old and wrinkled monkey well might be ashamed is his, with great, sad eyes that never change their look, whatever they behold. *Wah*, in Allah's glorious name I take refuge from the rejected one——"

"All right; all right, take refuge all you please, but get on with your report," Ingraham cut in testily. "You say he has the natives organized?"

"Like the little blades of grass that come forth in the early rains, O Hiji. Their spears are numerous as the great trees of the forest, and everywhere they range the woods lest strangers come upon them.

They killed two members of the Mendi who came upon them unawares, and I was forced to sleep in trees like any of the monkey people; for to be caught near MacAndrews' is to enter into Paradise—and the cooking-pot."

"Eh? The devil! They're practising cannibalism?"

"Thou sayest."

"Who——"

"The white man of the evil, wrinkled face; he whom they call Bazarri; he has appointed it. Also he gives them much trade gin. I think there will be shooting before long; spears will fly as thick as gnats about the carcass—*hai,* and bullets, too. The little guns which stutter will laugh the laugh of death, and the bayonets will go *bung!* as we drive them home to make those dam' bush feller know our lord the Emperor-King is master still."

"Right you are," the Englishman returned, and there was something far from pleasant at the corners of his mouth as he smiled at Sergeant Bendigo.

"Gentlemen"—he turned to us—"this is my sergeant and my right-hand man. We can accept all that he tells us as the truth.

"Sergeant, these men come from far away to help us hunt this evil man of whom you tell me."

THE sergeant drew himself erect again and tendered us a grave salute. His slightly flaring nostrils and smooth, brown skin announced his negroid heritage, but the thin-lipped mouth, the straight, sleek hair and finely modeled hands and feet were pure Arab, while the gleaming, piercing eyes and quick, cruel smile were equally pure devil. De Grandin knew him for a kindred spirit instantly.

"*Tiens, mon brave,* it is a fine thing you have done, this discovering of their devil's nest," he complimented as he raised his hand in answer to the sergeant's military courtesy. "You think we yet shall come to grips with them?"

Bendigo's eyes shone with anticipation and delight, his white teeth flashed between his back-drawn lips. "May Allah spare me till that day!" he answered. It was a born killer speaking, a man who took as aptly to the deadly risks of police work as ever duckling took to water.

"Very well, Sergeant," Ingraham ordered; "take the squad and hook it for Freetown as fast as you can; we'll be along in a few days."

Bendigo saluted again, executed a perfect about-face and marched to the door. Once in the hotel corridor he dropped his military bearing and slouched into the sunshine where his confreres waited.

"Stout feller, that," Ingraham remarked. "I sent him a wire to go native and pop up to MacAndrews' and nose round, then follow the trail overland to Monrovia, pickin' up what information he could *en route.* It's a holy certainty nothing happened on the way he didn't see, too."

"But isn't there a chance some of that gang he called to help him with our luggage may give the show away?" I asked. "They didn't seem any too choice a crowd to me."

Ingraham smiled, a trifle bleakly. "I hardly think so," he replied. "You see, they're all members of Bendigo's platoon. He brought 'em here to help him carry on."

DE GRANDIN and Renouard went on to Dakar, while Ingraham, John Davisson and I took packet north to Freetown.

Our expedition quickly formed. A hundred frontier policemen with guns and bayonets, five Lewis guns in charge of expert operators, with Ingraham and Bendigo in command, set out in a small, wood-burning steamer toward Falaba. We halted overnight at the old fortress

town, camping underneath the loopholed walls, then struck out overland toward the French border.

The rains had not commenced, nor would they for a month or so, and the *Narmattan,* the ceaseless northwest wind blowing up from the Sahara, swept across the land like a steady draft from a boiler room. The heat was bad, the humidity worse; it was like walking through a superheated hothouse as we beat our way along the jungle trails, now marching through comparatively clear forest, now hacking at the trailing undergrowth, or pausing at the mud-bank of some sluggish stream to force a passage while our native porters beat the turbid water with sticks to keep the crocodiles at a respectful distance.

"We're almost there," Ingraham announced one evening as we sat before his tent, imbibing whisky mixed with tepid water, "and I don't like the look of things a bit."

"How's that?" I asked. "It seems extremely quiet to me; we've scarcely seen——"

"That's it! We haven't seen a bloomin' thing, or heard one, either. Normally these woods are crawlin' with natives—Timni or Sulima, even if the beastly Mendi don't show up. This trip we've scarcely seen a one. Not only that, they should be gossipin' on the *lokali*—the jungle telegraph-drum, you know—tellin' the neighbors miles away that we're headin' north by east, but—damn it; I don't *like* it!"

"Oh, you're getting nerves," Davisson told him with a laugh. "I'm going to turn in. Good-night."

Ingraham watched him moodily as he walked across the little clearing to his tent beneath an oil-palm tree. "Silly ass," he muttered. "If he knew this country as I do he'd be singin' a different sort o' chanty. Nerves—good Lord!"

He reached inside his open tunic for tobacco pouch and pipe, but stiffened suddenly, like a pointer coming on a covey of quail. Next instant he was on his feet, the Browning flashing from the holster strapped against his leg, and a savage spurt of flame stabbed through the darkness.

Like a prolongation of the pistol's roar there came a high-pitched, screaming cry, and something big and black and bulky crashed through the palm-tree's fronds, hurtling to the earth right in Davisson's path.

We raced across the clearing, and Ingraham stooped and struck a match. "Nerves, eh?" he asked sarcastically, as the little spot of orange flame disclosed a giant native, smeared with oil and naked save for a narrow belt of leopard hide bound round his waste and another band of spotted fur wound round his temples. On each hand he wore a glove of leopard skin, and fixed to every finger was a long, hooked claw of sharpened iron. One blow from those spiked gloves and any one sustaining it would have had the flesh ripped from his bones.

"Nerves, eh?" the Englishman repeated. "Jolly good thing for you I had 'em, young feller me lad, and that I saw this beggar crouchin' in the tree——

"The devil! You would, eh?" The inert native, bleeding from a bullet in his thigh, had regained the breath the tumble from the tree knocked from him, raised on his elbow and struck a slashing blow at Ingraham's legs. The Englishman swung his pistol barrel with crushing force upon the native's head; then, as Bendigo and half a dozen Houssas hurried up:

"O Sergeant Man, prepare a harness for this beast and keep him safely till his spirit has returned."

The sergeant saluted, and in a moment the prisoner was securely trussed with cords.

SOME twenty minutes later Bendigo stood at Ingraham's tent, a light of pleased anticipation shining in his eyes. "Prisoner's spirit has come back, O Hiji," he reported.

"Good, bring him here.

"I see you, Leopard Man," he opened the examination when they brought the fettered captive to us.

The prisoner eyed him sullenly, but volunteered no answer.

"Who sent you through the woods to do this evil thing?" Ingraham pursued.

"The leopard hates and kills; he does not talk," the man replied.

"Oko!" the Englishman returned grimly. "I think this leopard will talk, and be jolly glad to. Sergeant, build a fire!"

Sergeant Bendigo had evidently anticipated this, for dry sticks and kindling were produced with a celerity nothing short of marvelous.

"I hate to do this, Trowbridge," Ingraham told me, "but I've got to get the truth out of this blighter, and get it in a hurry. Go to your tent if you think you can't stand it."

The captive howled and beat his head against the earth and writhed as though he were an eel upon the barbs when they thrust his bare soles into the glowing embers; but not until the stench of burning flesh rose sickeningly upon the still night air did he shake his head from side to side in token of surrender.

"Now, then, who sent you?" Ingraham demanded when the prisoner's blistered feet were thrust into a canvas bucket full of water. "Speak up, and speak the truth, or——" he nodded toward the fire which smoldered menacingly as a Houssa policeman fed it little bits of broken sticks to keep it ready for fresh service.

"You are Hiji," said the prisoner, as though announcing that the sun had ceased to shine and the rivers ceased to flow. "You are He-Who-Comes-When-No-Man-Thinks-Him-Near. They told us you were gone away across the mighty water."

"Who told you this great lie, O fool?"

"Bazarri. He came with other white men through the woods and told us you were fled and that the soldiers of the Emperor-King would trouble us no more. They said the Leopard Men should rule the land again, and no one bid us stop."

"What were you doing here, son of a fish?"

"Last moon Bazarri sent us forth in search of slaves. Much help is needed for the digging which he makes, for he prepares a mighty pit where, in a night and a night, they celebrate the marriage of a mortal woman to the King of all the Devils. My brethren took the prisoners back, but I and as many others as a man has eyes remained behind to——"

"To stage a little private cannibalism, eh?"

"They told us that the soldiers would not come this way again," the prisoner answered in excuse.

Ingraham smiled, but not pleasantly. "That's the explanation, eh?" he murmured to himself. "No wonder we haven't seen or heard anything of the villagers. These damned slavers have taken most of 'em up to MacAndrews' and those they didn't kill or capture are hidin' in the bush." To the prisoner:

"Is this Bizarri a white man with the body of a youth and the wrinkled face of an old monkey?"

"Lord, who can say how you should know this thing?"

"Does he know that I am coming with my soldiers to send him to the land of ghosts?"

"Lord, he does not know. He thinks that you have gone across the great water. If he knew you were here he would have gone against you with his guns, and with

the Leopard Men to kill you while you slept."

"The Emperor-King's men never sleep," retorted Ingraham. To Bendigo:

"A firing-party for this one, Sergeant. The palaver is over.

"We must break camp at once," he added as eight tarbooshed policemen marched smartly past, their rifles at slant arms. "You heard what he said; they're all set to celebrate that girl's marriage to the Devil in two more nights. We can just make it to MacAndrews' by a forced march."

"Can't you spare this poor fellow's life?" I pleaded. "You've gotten what you want from him, and——"

"No chance," he told me shortly. "The penalty for membership in these Leopard Societies is death; so is the punishment for slaving and cannibalism. If it ever got about that we'd caught one of the 'Little Leopards' red-handed and let him off, government authority would get an awful black eye."

He buttoned his blouse, put on his helmet and marched across the clearing. "Detail, halt; front rank, kneel; ready; take aim—fire!" his orders rang in sharp staccato, and the prisoner toppled over, eight rifle bullets in his breast.

Calmly as though it were a bit of everyday routine, Sergeant Bendigo advanced, drew his pistol and fired a bullet in the prone man's ear. The head, still bound in its fillet of leopard skin, bounced upward with the impact of the shot, then fell back flaccidly. The job was done.

"Dig a grave and pile some rocks on it, then cover it with ashes from the fire," Ingraham ordered. To me he added:

"Can't afford to have hyenas unearthin' him or vultures wheelin' round, you know. It would give the show away. If any of his little playmates found him and saw the bullet marks they might make tracks for MacAndrews'—and we want to get there first."

We broke camp in half an hour, pushed onward through the night and marched until our legs were merely so much aching muscles the next day. Six hours' rest, then again the endless, hurrying march.

Twice we saw evidence of the Leopards' visits, deserted villages where blackened rings marked the site of burned huts, red stains upon the earth, vultures disputing over ghastly scraps of flesh and bone.

As we passed through the second village the scouts brought back a woman, a slender, frightened girl of fifteen or so, with a face which might have been a Gorgon's and a figure fit to make a Broadway entrepreneur discharge his entire chorus in disgust.

"Thou art my father and my mother," she greeted Ingraham conventionally.

"Where are thy people?" he demanded.

"In the land of ghosts, lord," she replied. "A day and a day ago there came to us the servants of Bazarri, men of the Little Leopards, with iron claws upon their hands and white men's guns. They said to us: 'The Emperor-King is overthrown; no longer shall his soldiers bring the law to you. Come with us and serve Bazarri, who is the servant of the Great King of All Devils, and we shall make you rich.'

" 'This is bad palaver, and when Hiji comes he will hang you to a tree,' my father told them.

" 'Hiji is gone across the great water, and will never come here more,' they told my father. Then they killed many of my people, and some they took as slaves to serve Bazarri where the King of Devils makes a marriage with a mortal woman. Lord, hadst thou been here three days ago my father had not died."

"Maiden," Ingraham answered, "go tell thy people to come again into their vil-

lage and build the huts the evil men burned down. Behold, I and my soldiers travel swiftly to give punishment to these evil men. Some I shall hang and some my men will shoot; but surely I shall slay them all. Those who defy the Emperor-King's commands have not long lives."

THE sudden tropic dark had long since fallen, and it was almost midnight by the hands on Ingraham's luminous watch dial when we reached the edge of a large clearing with a sharply rising hill upon its farther side. From behind this elevation shone a ruddy light, as though a dozen wooden houses burned at once.

"Quiet, thirty lashes for the one who makes a sound," said Ingraham as we halted at the forest edge. "Get those Lewis guns ready; fix bayonets.

"Sergeant, take two men and go forward. If any one accosts you, shoot him down immediately. We'll charge the moment we hear a shot."

Twenty minutes, half an hour, three-quarters, passed. Still no warning shot, no sign of Sergeant Bendigo or his associates.

"By the Lord Harry, I'm half a mind to chance it!" Ingraham muttered. "They may have done Bendigo in, and——"

"No, sar, Bendigo is here," a whisper answered him, and a form rose suddenly before us. "Bendigo has drunk the broth of serpent's flesh, he can move through the dark and not be seen."

"I'll say he can," the Englishman agreed. "What's doing?"

"No end dam' swanky palaver over there," returned the sergeant. "Many people sit around like elders at the council and watch while others make some show before them. I think we better go there pretty soon."

"So do I," returned his officer.

"Attention, charge bayonets; no shooting till I give the word. Quick step, march!"

We passed across the intervening clearing, mounted the steep slope of grassy bank, and halted at the ridge. Before us, like a stage, was such a sight as I had never dreamed of, even in my wildest flights of fancy.

24. The Devil's Bride

"GREAT guns!" Ingraham exclaimed as we threw ourselves upon our stomachs and wriggled to the crown of the hill, "old MacAndrews knew a thing or two, dotty as he was! Look at that masonry—perfect as it was when Augustus Cæsar ruled the world! The old Scotsman would have had the laugh on all of 'em, if he'd only lived."

What I had thought a long, steep-sided natural hill was really the nearer of two parallel earthen ramparts, and between these, roughly oval in form, a deep excavation had been made, disclosing tier on tier of ancient stone benches rising terrace-like about an amphitheater. Behind these were retaining walls of mortised stone—obviously the well-preserved remains of a Roman circus.

The arena between the curving ranks of benches was paved with shining sand, washed and rewashed until it shone with almost dazzling whiteness, and the whole enclosure was aglow with ruddy light, for stretching in an oval round the sanded floor was set a line of oil-palms, each blazing furiously, throwing tongues of orange flame high in the air and making every object in the excavation visible as though illumined by the midday sun.

The leaping, crackling flames disclosed the tenants of the benches, row after row of red-robed figures, hoods drawn well forward on their faces, hands hidden in the loose sleeves of their gowns, but every one intent upon the spectacle below,

heads bent, each line of their voluminously robed bodies instinct with eagerness and gloating, half-restrained anticipation.

The circus proper was some hundred yards in length by half as many wide. Almost beneath us crouched a group of black musicians who, even as we looked, began a thumping monody on their double-headed drums, beating a sort of slow adagio with one hand, a fierce, staccato syncopation with the other. The double-timed insistence of it mounted to my head like some accursed drug. Despite myself I felt my hands and feet twitching to the rhythm of those drums, a sort of tingling racing up my spine. The red-robed figures on the benches were responding, too, heads swaying, hands no longer hidden in their sleeves, but striking together softly, as if in acclamation of the drummers' skill.

At the arena's farther end, where the double line of benches broke, was hung a long red curtain blazoned with the silver image of the strutting peacock, and from behind the folds of the thick drapery we saw that some activity was toward, for the carmine cloth would swing in rippling folds from time to time as though invisible hands were clutching it.

"Now, I wonder what the deuce——" Ingraham began, but stopped abruptly as the curtain slowly parted and into the firelight marched a figure. From neck to heels he was enveloped in a robe of shimmering scarlet silk, thick-sewn with glistening gems worked in the image of a peacock. Upon his head he wore a beehive-shaped turban of red silk set off with a great medallion of emeralds.

One look identified him. Though we had seen him suffer death in the electric chair and later looked upon him lying in his casket, there was no doubt in either of our minds. The Oriental potentate who paced the shining sands before us was Grigor Bazarov, the Red Priest who officiated at the Mass of St. Sécaire!

Beside him, to his right and left, and slightly to the rear, marched the men who acted as deacon and sub-deacon when he served the altar of the Devil, but now they were arrayed in costumes almost as gorgeous as their chief's, turbans of mixed red and black upon their heads, brooches of red stones adorning them, curved swords flashing in jeweled scabbards at their waists.

Attended by his satellites the Red Priest made the circuit of the colosseum, and as he passed, the red-robed figures on the benches arose and did him reverence.

Now he and his attendants took station before the squatting drummers, and as he raised his hand in signal the curtains at the arena's farther end were parted once again and from them came a woman, tall, fair-haired, purple-eyed, enveloped in a loose-draped cloak of gleaming cloth of gold. A moment she paused breathlessly upon the margin of the shining sand, and as she waited two tall black women, stark naked save for gold bands about their wrists and ankles, stepped quickly forward from the curtain's shrouding folds, grasped the golden cloak which clothed her and lifted it away, so that she stood revealed, nude as her two serving-maids, her white and lissom body gleaming in sharp contrast to their black forms as an ivory figurine might shine beside two statuettes of ebony.

A single quick glance told us she was crazed with aphrodisiacs and the never-pausing rhythm of the drums. With a wild, abandoned gesture she threw back her mop of yellow hair, tossed her arms above her head and, bending nearly double, raced across the sands until she paused a moment by the drummers, her body stretched as though upon a rack as she rose on tiptoe and reached her hands up to the moonless sky.

Then the dance. As thin as nearly fleshless bones could make her, her figure still was slight, rather than emaciated, and as she bent and twisted, writhed and whirled, then stood stock-still and rolled her narrow hips and straight, flat abdomen, I felt the hot blood mounting in my cheeks and the pulses beating in my temples in time with the insistent throbbing of the drums. Pose after pose instinct with lecherous promise melted into still more lustful postures as patterns change their forms upon the lens of a kaleidoscope.

Now a vocal chorus seconded the music of the tom-toms:

"Ho, hol, hola,
Ho, hol, hola;
Tou bonia berbe Azid!"

The Red Priest and the congregation repeated the lines endlessly, striking their hands together at the ending of each stanza.

"Good God!" Ingraham muttered in my ear. "D'ye get it, Trowbridge?"

"No," I whispered back. "What is it?"

"*'Tou bonia berbe Azid'* means 'thou hast become a lamb of the Devil!' It's the invocation which precedes a human sacrifice!"

"B—but——" I faltered, only to have the words die upon my tongue, for the Red Priest stepped forward, unsheathing the simitar from the jeweled scabbard at his waist. He tendered it to her, blade foremost, and I winced involuntarily as I saw her take the steel in her bare hand and saw the blood spurt like a ruby dye between her fingers as the razor-edge bit through the soft flesh to the bone.

But in her wild delirium she was insensible to pain. The curved sword whirled like darting lightning round her head, circling and flashing in the burning palm-trees' light till it made a silver halo for her golden hair. Then——

It all occurred so quickly that I scarcely knew what happened till the act was done. The wildly whirling blade reversed its course, struck inward suddenly and passed across her slender throat, its superfine edge propelled so fiercely by her maddened hand that she was virtually decapitated.

The rhythm of the drums increased, the flying fingers of the drummers beating a continuous roar which filled the sultry night like thunder, and the red-robed congregation rose like one individual, bellowing wild approval at the suicide. The dancer tripped and stumbled in her corybantic measure, a spate of ruby lifeblood cataracting down her snowy bosom; wheeled round upon her toes a turn or two, then toppled to the sand, her hands and feet and body twitching with a tremor like the jerking of a victim of St. Vitus dance. She raised herself upon her elbows and tried to call aloud, but the gushing blood drowned out her voice. Then she fell forward on her face and lay prostrate in the sand, her dying heart still pumping spurts of blood from her severed veins and arteries.

The sharp, involuntary twitching of the victim ceased, and with it stopped the gleeful rumble of the drums. The Red Priest raised his hand as if in invocation. "That the Bride of Lucifer may tread across warm blood!" he told the congregation in a booming voice, then pointed to the crimson pool which dyed the snowy sand before the trailing scarlet curtain.

The two black women who had taken off her cloak approached the quivering body of the self-slain girl, lifted it—one by the shoulders, the other by the feet—and bore it back behind the scarlet curtain, their progress followed by a trail of ruddy drops which trickled from the dead girl's severed throat at every step they took.

MAJESTICALLY the Red Priest drew his scarlet mantle round him, waved to the drummers to precede him,

then, followed by his acolytes, passed through the long red curtains in the wake of the victim and the bearers of the dead.

A whispering buzz, a sort of œstrus of anticipation, ran through the red-robed congregation as the archpriest vanished, but the clanging, brazen booming of a bell cut the sibilation short.

Clang!

A file of naked blacks marched out in the arena, each carrying a sort of tray slung from a strap about his shoulders, odd, gourd-like pendants hanging from the board. Each held a short stave with a leather-padded head in either hand, and with a start of horror I recognized the things—trust a physician of forty years' experience to know a human thigh-bone when he sees it!

Clang!

The black men squatted on the glittering, firelit sand, and without a signal of any sort that we could see, began to hammer on the little tables resting on their knees. The things were crude marimbas, primitive xylophones with hollow gourds hung under them for resonators, and, incredible as it seemed, produced a music strangely like the reeding of an organ. A long, resounding chord, so cleverly sustained that it simulated the great swelling of a bank of pipes; then, slowly, majestically, there boomed forth within that ancient Roman amphitheater the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin.*

Clang!

Unseen hands put back the scarlet curtain which had screened the Red Priest's exit. There, reared against the amphitheater's granite wall, was a cathedral altar, ablaze with glittering candles. Arranged behind the altar like a reredos was a giant figure, an archangelic figure with great, outspread wings, but with the long, bearded face of a leering demon, goat's horns protruding from its brow. The crucifix upon the altar was reversed, and beneath its down-turned head stretched the scarlet mattress which I knew would later hold a human altar-cloth. To right and left were small side altars, like sanctuaries raised to saints in Christian churches. That to the right bore the hideous figure of a man in ancient costume with the head of a rhinoceros. I had seen its counterpart in a museum; it was the figure of the Evil One of Olden Egypt, Set, the slayer of Osiris. Upon the left was raised an altar to an obscene idol carved of some black stone, a female figure, gnarled and knotted and articulated in a manner suggesting horrible deformity. From the shoulder-sockets three arms sprang out to right and left, a sort of pointed cap adorned the head, and about the pendulous breasts serpents twined and writhed, while a girdle of gleaming skulls, carved of white bone, encircled the waist. Otherwise it was nude, with a nakedness which seemed obscene even to me, a medical practitioner for whom the human body held no secrets. Kali, "the Six-Armed One of Horrid Form," goddess of the murderous Thugs of India, I knew the thing to be.

Clang!

The bell beat out its twelfth and final stroke, and from an opening in the wall directly under us a slow procession came. First walked the crucifer, the *corpus* of his cross head-downward, a peacock's effigy perched atop the rood; then, two by two, ten acolytes with swinging censers, the fumes of which swirled slowly through the air in writhing clouds of heady, maddening perfume. Next marched a robed and surpliced man who swung a tinkling sacring bell, and then, beneath a canopy of scarlet silk embossed with gold, the Red Priest came, arrayed in full ecclesiastical regalia. Close in his footsteps marched his servers, vested as deacon and subdeacon, and after them a double file of women votaries arrayed in red, long

veils of crimson net upon their heads, hands crossed demurely on their bosoms.

SLOWLY the procession passed between the rows of blazing palm-trees, deployed before the altar and formed in crescent shape, the Red Priest and his acolytes in the center.

A moment's pause in the marimba music; then the Red Priest raised his hand, palm forward, as if in salutation, and chanted solemnly:

"To the Gods of Egypt who are Devils,
To the Gods of Babylon in Nether Darkness,
To all the Gods of all Forgotten Peoples,
Who rest not, but lust eternally——
Hail!"

Turning to the rhinoceros-headed monster on the right he bowed respectfully and called:

"Hail Thee who art Doubly Evil,
Who comest forth from Ati,
Who proceedest from the Lake of Nefer,
Who comest from the Courts of Sechet——
Hail!"

To the left he turned and invoked the female horror:

"Hail, Kali, Daughter of Himavat,
Hail, Thou about whose waist hang human skulls,
Hail, Devi of Horrid Form,
Malign Image of Destructiveness,
Eater-up of all that is good,
Disseminater of all which is wicked——
Hail!"

Finally, looking straight before him, he raised both hands above his head and fairly screamed:

"And Thou, Great Barran-Sathanas,
Azid, Beelzebub, Lucifer, Asmodeum,
Or whatever name Thou wishest to be known by,
Lucifer, Mighty Lord of Earth,
Prince of the Powers of the Air;
We give Thee praise and adoration
Now and ever, Mighty Master.
Hail, all hail, Great Lucifer.
Hail, all hail!"

"All hail!" responded the red congregation.

Slowly the Red Priest mounted to the sanctuary. A red nun tore away her habit, rending scarlet silk and cloth as though in very ecstasy of haste, and, nude and gleaming-white, climbed quickly up and laid herself upon the scarlet cushion. They set the chalice and the paten on her branded breast and the Red Priest genuflected low before the living altar, then turned and, kneeling with his back presented to the sanctuary, crossed himself in reverse with his left hand and, rising once again, his left hand raised, bestowed a mimic blessing on the congregation.

A long and death-still silence followed, a silence so intense that we could hear the hissing of the resin as the palm-trees burned, and when a soldier moved uneasily beside me in the grass the rasping of his tunic buttons on the earth came shrilly to my ears.

"Now, what the deuce——" Ingraham began, but checked himself and craned his neck to catch a glimpse of what was toward in the arena under us; for, as one man, the red-robed congregation had turned to face the tunnel entrance leading to the amphitheater opposite the altar, and a sign that sounded like the rustling of the autumn wind among the leaves made the circuit of the benches.

I could not see the entrance, for the steep sides of the excavation hid it from my view, but in a moment I descried a double row of iridescent peacocks strutting forward, their shining tails erected, their glistening wings lowered till the quills cut little furrows in the sand. Slowly, pridefully, as though they were aware of their magnificence, the jeweled birds marched across the hippodrome, and in their wake——

"For God's sake!" exclaimed Ingraham.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated.

"Alice!" John Davisson's low cry was freighted with stark horror and despairing recognition.

It was Alice; unquestionably it was she; but how completely metamorphosed! A diadem of beaten gold, thick-set with flashing jewels, was clasped about her head. Above the circlet, where dark hair and white skin met at the temples, there *grew a pair of horns!* They grew, there was no doubt of it, for even at that distance I could see the skin fold forward round the bony base of the protuberances; no skilful make-up artist could have glued them to her flesh in such a way. Incredible—impossible—as I knew it was, it could not be denied. A pair of curving goat-horns *grew* from the girl's head and reared upward exactly like the horns on carved or painted figures of the Devil!

A collar of gold workmanship, so wide its outer edges rested on her shoulders, was round her neck, and below the gleaming gorget her white flesh shone like ivory; for back, abdomen and bosom were unclothed and the nipples of her high-set, virgin breasts were stained a brilliant red with henna. About her waist was locked the silver marriage girdle of the Yezidees, the girdle she had worn so laughingly that winter evening long ago when we assembled at St. Chrysostom's to rehearse her wedding to John Davisson. Below the girdle—possibly supported by it—hung a skirt of iridescent sequins, so long that it barely cleared her ankles, so tight that it gave her only four or five scant inches for each pace, so that she walked with slow, painstaking care lest the fetter of the garment's hem should trip her as she stepped. The skirt trailed backward in a point a foot or so behind her, leaving a little track in the soft sand, as though a serpent had crawled there and, curiously, giving an oddly serpentine appearance from the rear.

Bizarre and sinister as her costume was, the transformation of her face was more so. The slow, half-scornful, half-mocking smile upon her painted mouth, the beckoning, alluring glance which looked out from between her kohl-stained eyelids, the whole provocative expression of her countenance was strange to Alice Hume. This was no woman we had ever known, this horned, barbaric figure from the painted halls of Asur; it was some wanton, cruel she-devil who held possession of the body we had known as hers.

And so she trod across the shining sand on naked, milk-white feet, the serpent-track left by her trailing gown winding behind her like an accusation. And as she walked she waved her jewel-encrusted hands before her, weaving fantastic arabesques in empty air as Eastern fakirs do when they would lay a charm on the beholder.

"Hail, Bride of Night,
Hail, horned Bride of Mighty Lucifer;
Hail, thou who comest from the depths of far Abaddon;
Hail and thrice hail to her who passes over blood and fire
That she may greet her Bridegroom!
Hail, all hail!"

cried the Red Priest, and as he finished speaking, from each side the altar rushed a line of red-veiled women, each bearing in her hands a pair of wooden pincers between the prongs of which there glowed and smoldered a small square of superheated stone. That the rocks were red-hot could not be denied, for we could see the curling smoke and even little licking tongues of flame as the wooden tongs took fire from them.

The women laid their fiery burdens down upon the sand, making an incandescent path of glowing stepping-stones some ten feet long, leading directly to the altar's lowest step.

And now the strange, barbaric figure with its horn-crowned head had reached the ruddy stain upon the sand where the dancing suicide had bled her life away, and now her snowy feet were stained a horrid scarlet, but never did she pause in

her slithering step. Now she reached the path of burning stones, and now her tender feet were pressed against them, but she neither hastened nor retreated in her march—to blood and fire alike she seemed indifferent.

Now she reached the altar's bottom step and paused a moment, not in doubt or fear, but rather seeming to debate the easiest way to mount the step's low lift and yet not trip against the binding hobble of her skirt's tight hem.

At length, when one or two false trials had been made, she managed to get up the step by turning sidewise and raising her nearer foot with slow care, transferring her weight to it, then mounting with a sudden hopping jump.

Three steps she had negotiated in this slow, awkward fashion, when:

"For God's sake, aren't you going to *do* anything?" John Davisson hissed in Ingraham's ear. "She's almost up—are you going to let 'em go through with——"

"Sergeant," Ingraham turned to Bendigo, ignoring John completely, "are the guns in place?"

"Yas, sar, everything dam' top-hole," the sergeant answered with a grin.

"Very well, then, a hundred yards will be about the proper range. Ready——"

The order died upon his lips, and he and I and all of us sat forward, staring in hang-jawed amazement.

From the tunnel leading to the ancient dungeons at the back of the arena, a slender figure came, paused a moment at the altar steps, then mounted them in three quick strides.

It was Jules de Grandin.

He was in spotless khaki, immaculate from linen-covered sun-hat to freshly polished boots; his canvas jacket and abbreviated cotton shorts might just have left the laundress' hands, and from the way he bore his slender silver-headed cane beneath his left elbow one might have thought that he was ready for a promenade instead of risking almost sure and dreadful death.

"Pardonnez-moi, Messieurs — Mesdames"—he bowed politely to the company of priests and women at the altar—"but this wedding, he can not go on. No, he must be stopped — right away; at once."

The look upon the Red Priest's face was almost comical. His big, sad eyes were opened till it seemed that they were lidless, and a corpse-gray pallor overspread his wrinkled countenance.

"Who dares forbid the banns?" he asked, recovering his aplomb with difficulty.

"Parbleu," the little Frenchman answered with a smile, "the British Empire and the French Republic for two formidable objectors; and last, although by no means least, *Monsieur,* no less a one than Jules de Grandin."

"Audacious fool!" the Red Priest almost howled.

"But certainly," de Grandin bowed, as though acknowledging a compliment, *"l'audace, encore de l'audace, toujours de l'audace;* it is I."

The Devil's Bride had reached the topmost step while this colloquy was toward. Absorbed in working herself up to the altar, she had not realized the visitor's identity. Now, standing at the altar, she recognized de Grandin, and her pose of evil provocation dropped from her as if it were a cast-off garment.

"Doctor—Doctor de Grandin!" she gasped unbelievingly, and with a futile, piteous gesture she clasped her hands across her naked bosom as though to draw a cloak around herself.

"Précisément, ma pauvre, and I am here to take you home," the little Frenchman answered, and though he looked at her and smiled, his little sharp blue eyes

were alert to note the smallest movement of the men about the altar.

The Red Priest's voice broke in on them. "Wretched meddler, do you imagine that your God can save you now?" he asked.

"He has been known to work much greater miracles," de Grandin answered mildly. "Meantime, if you will kindly stand aside——"

The Red Priest interrupted in a low-pitched, deadly voice: "Before tomorrow's sun has risen we'll crucify you on that altar, as——"

"As you did crucify the poor young woman in America?" de Grandin broke in coldly. "I do not think you will, my friend."

"No? Dmitri, Kasimir—seize this cursed dog!"

The deacon and subdeacon, who had been edging closer all the while, leaped forward at their master's bidding, but the deacon halted suddenly, as though colliding with an unseen barrier, and the savage snarl upon his gipsy features gave way to a puzzled look—a look of almost comic pained surprize. Then we saw spreading on his face a widening smear of red—red blood which ran into his eyes and dripped down on his parted lips before he tumbled headlong to the crimson carpet spread before the altar.

The other man had raised his hands, intent on bringing them down on de Grandin's shoulders with a crushing blow. Now, suddenly, the raised hands shook and quivered in the air, then clutched spasmodically at nothing, while a look of agony spread across his face. He hiccupped once and toppled forward, a spate of ruby blood pouring from his mouth and drowning out his death cry.

"And still you would deny me one poor miracle, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked the Red Priest in a level, almost toneless voice.

Indeed, it seemed miraculous. Two men had died—from gunshot wounds, by all appearances — yet we had heard no shot. But:

"Nice work, Frenchy!" Ingraham whispered approvingly. "They have some sharpshooters with silencers on their guns up there," he told me. "I saw the flashes when those two coves got it in the neck. Slick work, eh, what? He'll have those fellers groggy in a minute, and——"

The Red Priest launched himself directly at de Grandin with a roar of bestial fury. The little Frenchman sidestepped neatly, grasped the silver handle of his cane where it projected from his left elbow, and drew the gleaming sword blade from the stick.

"Ah-ha?" he chuckled. *"Ah-ha-ha, Monsieur Diablotin,* you did not bargain for this, *hein?"* He swung the needle-like rapier before him in a flashing circle, then, swiftly as a cobra strikes, thrust forward. "That one for the poor girl whom you crucified!" he cried, and the Red Priest staggered back a step, his hand raised to his face. The Frenchman's blade had pierced his left eyeball.

"And take this for the poor one whom you blinded!" de Grandin told him as he thrust a second time, driving the rapier point full in the other eye.

The Red Priest tottered drunkenly, his hands before his blinded eyes, but de Grandin knew no mercy. "And you may have this for the honest gendarme whom you shot," he added, lashing the blind man's wrinkled cheeks with the flat of his blade, "and last of all, take this for those so helpless little lads who died upon your cursed altar!" He sank backward on one foot, then straightened suddenly forward, stiffening his sword-arm and plunging his point directly in the Red Priest's opened mouth.

A scream of agonizing pain rang out with almost deafening shrillness, and the

blind man partly turned, as though upon an unseen pivot, clawed with horrid impotence at the wire-fine blade of the little Frenchman's rapier, then sank slowly to the altar, his death-scream stifled to a sickening gurgle as his throat filled up with blood.

"Fini!" de Grandin cried, then:

"If you are ready, *Mademoiselle,* we shall depart," he bowed to Alice, and:

"Holè—la corde!" he cried abruptly, raising his hand in signal to some one overhead.

Like a great serpent, a thick hemp hawser twisted down against the amphitheater's wall, and in the fading light shed from the burning trees we saw the gleam of blue coats and red fezzes where the native gendarmes stood above the excavation, their rifles at the "ready."

De Grandin flung an arm around Alice, took a quick turn of the rope around his other arm, and nodded vigorously. Like the flying fairies in a pantomime they rose up in the air, past the high altar, past the horned and pinioned image of the Devil, past the stone wall of the colosseum, upward to the excavation's lip, where ready hands stretched out to drag them back to safety.

Now the red congregation was in tumult. While de Grandin parleyed with the Red Priest, even while he slew him with his sword, they had sat fixed in stupor, but as they saw the Frenchman and the girl hauled up to safety, a howl like the war-cry of the gathered demons of the pit rose from their throats—a cry of burning rage and thwarted lust and bitter, mordant disappointment. "Kill him!—after him!—crucify him!—burn him!" came the shouted admonition, and more than one cowled member of the mob drew out a pistol and fired it at the light patch which de Grandin's spotless costume made against the shadow.

"Fire!" roared Ingraham to his soldiers, and the crashing detonation of a rifle volley echoed through the night, and after it came the deadly *clack-clack-clatter* of the Lewis guns.

And from the farther side of the arena the French troops opened fire, their rifles blazing death, their Maxims spraying steady streams of bullets at the massed forms on the benches.

Suddenly there came a fearful detonation, accompanied by a blinding flare of flame. From somewhere on the French side a *bombe de main*—a hand grenade—was thrown, and like a bolt of lightning it burst against the stone wall shoring up the terraced seats about the colosseum.

The result was cataclysmic. The Roman architects who designed the place had built for permanency, but close upon two thousand years had passed since they had laid those stones, and centuries of pressing earth and trickling subsoil waters had crumbled the cement. When the Satanists turned back the earth they had not stopped to reinforce the masonry or shore up the raw edges of their cutting. Accordingly, the fierce explosion of the bursting bomb precipitated broken stone and sand and rubble into the ancient hippodrome, and instantly a landslide followed. Like sand that trickles in an open pit the broken stone and earth rushed down, engulfing the arena.

"Back—give back!" Ingraham cried, and we raced to safety with the earth falling from beneath our very feet.

It was over in a moment. Only a thin, expiring wisp of smoke emerging through a cleft in the slowly settling earth told where the palm-trees had been blazing furiously a few minutes before. Beneath a hundred thousand tons of sand and crumbling clay and broken stone was buried once again the ancient Roman ruin, and with it every one of those who

traveled round the world to see a mortal woman wedded to the Devil.

"By gosh, I think that little Frog was right when he said *'fini,'* " Ingraham exclaimed as he lined his Houssas up.

"Hamdullah, trouble comes, O Hiji!" Sergeant Bendigo announced. "Leopard fellers heard our shooting and come to see about it, Allah curse their noseless fathers!"

"By Jove, you're right!" Ingraham cried. "Form square—machine-guns to the front. At two hundred yards—fire!" The volley blazed and crackled from the line of leveled rifles and the shrewish chatter of the Lewis guns mingled with the wild, inhuman screams of the attackers.

On they came, their naked, ebon bodies one shade darker than the moonless tropic night, their belts and caps of leopard skin showing golden in the gloom. Man after man went down before the hail of lead, but on they came; closer, closer, closer!

Now something whistled through the air with a wicked, whirring sound, and the man beside me stumbled back, a five-foot killing spear protruding from his breast. "All things are with Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!" he choked, and the blood from his punctured lung made a horrid, gurgling noise, like water running down a partly occluded drain.

Now they were upon us, and we could see the camwood stains upon their faces and the markings on their wicker shields and the gleaming strings of human toe and finger bones which hung about their necks. We were outnumbered ten to one, and though the Houssas held their line with perfect discipline, we knew that it was but a matter of a quarter-hour at most before the last of us went down beneath the avalanche of pressing bodies and stabbing spears.

"Baïonette au cannon—Chargez!" the order rang out sharply on our left, followed by the shrilling of a whistle from the right, and half a hundred blue-clothed Senegalese gendarmes hurled themselves upon the left flank of our enemies, while as many more crashed upon the foemen from the right, bayonets flashing in the gun-fire, black faces mad with killing-lust and shining with the sweat of fierce exertion.

Now there was a different *timbre* in the Human Leopards' cries. Turned from hunters into quarry, like their bestial prototypes they stood at bay; but the lean, implacable Senegalese were at their backs, their eighteen-inch bayonets stabbing mercilessly, and Ingraham's Houssas barred their path in front.

At last a Leopard Man threw down his spear, and in a moment all were empty-handed. *"Faire halte!"* Renouard commanded, jamming his pistol back into its holster and shouldering his way between the ranks of cringing captives.

"Monsieur le Capitaine," he saluted Ingraham with due formality, "I greatly deprecate the circumstances which have forced us to invade your territory, and herewith tender our apologies, but——"

"Apology's accepted, sweet old soul!" the Englishman cut in, clapping an arm about the Frenchman's shoulders and shaking him affectionately. "But I'd like to have your counsel in an important matter."

"Mais certainement," Renouard returned politely. "The matter for discussion is——" he paused expectantly.

"Do we hang or shoot these blighters?" Ingraham rejoined, nodding toward the group of prisoners.

25. The Brothers Bazarov

RENOUARD and Ingraham stayed behind to gather up loose ends—the "loose ends" being such members of the Leopard Men as had escaped the wholesale execu-

tion—for they were determined to exterminate the frightful cult. De Grandin and I, accompanied by a dozen Senegalese gendarmes, took Alice overland to Dakar, and Renouard dispatched a messenger before us to advise the hospital that we would need a private room for several days.

Since the night de Grandin rescued her the girl had lain in a half-stupor, and when she showed signs of returning consciousness the little Frenchman promptly gave her opiates. "It is better that she wake when all is finished and regard the whole occurrence as a naughty dream," he told me.

"But how the deuce did they graft those devilish horns on her?" I wondered. "There is no doubt about it; the things are growing, but——"

"All in good time," he soothed. "When we arrive at Dakar we shall see, my friend."

We did. The morning after our arrival we took her to the operating-room, and while she lay in anesthesia, de Grandin deftly laid the temporal skin aside, making a perfect star-shaped incision.

"Name of a little blue man, behold, my friend!" he ordered, bending across the operating-table and pointing at the open wound with his scalpel tip. "They were clever, those ones, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

The lower ends of the small horns had been skilfully riveted to thin disks of gold, and these had been inserted underneath the skin, which had then been sewed in place, so that the golden disks, held firmly between skin and tissue, had acted as anchors for the horns, which thus appeared to grow upon the young girl's head.

"Clever?" I echoed. "It's diabolical."

"*Eh bien,* they are frequently the same, my friend."

He sewed the slit skin daintily with an invisible subcutaneous stitch, matching the cut edges so perfectly that only the thinnest hair-line of red showed where he worked.

"*Voilà,*" he announced. This fellow Jules de Grandin puzzles me, my friend. When he acts the physician I am sure he is a better doctor than policeman, but when he is pursuing evil-doers I think he is a better gendarme than physician. The devil take the fellow; I shall never make him out!"

The little freighter wallowed in the rising swells, her twin propellers churning the blue water into buttermilk. Far astern the coast of Africa lay like the faintest wisp of smoke against the sky. Ahead lay France. De Grandin lit another cigarette and turned his quick, bird-like look from Renouard to me, then to the deck chairs where Davisson and Alice lay side by side, their fingers clasped, the light that never was on land or sea within their eyes.

"*Non,* my friends," he told us, "it is most simple when you understand it. How could the evil fellow leave his cell at the *poste de police,* invade Friend Trowbridge's house and all but murder *Mademoiselle?* How could he be lodged all safely in his cell, yet be abroad to kill poor Hornsby and all but kill the good Costello? How could he die in the electric chair, and lie all dead within his coffin, yet send his wolves to kidnap Mademoiselle Alice? You ask me?

"*Ah-ha,* the answer is he did not!

"What do you think from that, *hein?*"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, stop talking rot and tell us how it was—if you really know," I shot back crossly.

He grinned delightedly. "Perfectly, my friend. *Ecoutez-moi, s'il vous plaît.* When these so trying questions first began to puzzle me I drew my bow at venture. 'If *la Sûreté* can not tell me of him I am shipwrecked—no, how do you call him? sunk?'—I tell me. But I have great faith,

A man so wicked as Bazarov, and a European as well, has surely run afoul of the law in France, I think, and if he has done so the *Sûreté* most certainly has his *dossier*. And so I get his photograph and finger-prints from the governor of the prison and forward them to Paris. My answer waited for me at police headquarters at Dakar. It is this:

"Some five and forty years ago there lived in Mohilef a family named Bazarov. They had twin sons, Grigor and Vladimir. They were Roman Catholics.

"To be a Roman Catholic in Imperial Russia was much like being a Negro in the least enlightened of your Southern states today, my friends. Their political disabilities were burdensome, even in that land of dreadful despotism, and they walked in daily fear of molestation by the police, as well, since by the very fact of their adherence to the Church of Rome they were more than suspected of sympathy with Poland's aspirations for independence. The Poles, you will recall, are predominantly Roman Catholic in religion.

"Very well. The brothers Bazarov grew up, and in accordance with their parents' fondest wish, were sent to Italy to study for the church. In time they came back to their native land, duly ordained as fathers in the Roman Church, and sent to minister to their co-religionists in Russia. The good God knows there was a need of fathers in that land of orphans.

"Now in Russia they had a law which made the person having knowledge—even indirect—of a conspiracy to change the form of government, with or without violence, punishable by penal sentence for six years if he failed to transmit information to the police. A harmless literary club was formed in Mohilef and the brothers Bazarov attended several meetings, as a number of the members were of the Roman faith.

"When the police learned of this club, they pounced upon the members, and though there was not evidence enough to convict a weasel of chicken-killing, the poor wretches were found guilty, just the same, and sentenced to Siberia. The two young priests were caught in the police net, too, and charged with treasonably withholding information—because it was assumed they must have heard some treasonable news when they sat to hear confessions! *Enfin,* they were confined within the fortress-prison of St. Peter and St. Paul.

"They were immured in dungeons far below the level of the river, dungeons into which the water poured in time of inundation, so that the rats crawled on their shoulders to save themselves from drowning. What horrid tortures they were subject to within that earthly hell we can not surely say; but this we know: When they emerged from four years' suffering inside those prison walls, they came forth old and wrinkled men; moreover, they, who had received the rites of holy ordination, were atheists, haters of God and all his works, and sworn to sow the seed of atheism wherever they might go.

"We find them, then, as members of a group of anarchists in Paris, and there they were arrested, and much of their sad story written in the archives of the *Sûreté*.

"Another thing: As not infrequently happens among Russians, these brethren were possessed of an uncanny power over animals. Wild, savage dogs would fawn on them, the very lions and tigers in the zoo would follow them as far as the limits of their cages would permit, and seemed to greet them with all signs of friendship.

"You comprehend?"

"Why—you mean that while Grigor was under arrest his brother Vladimir impersonated him and broke into my house, then went out gunning for Costello——" I began, but he interrupted with a laugh.

"Oh, Trowbridge, great philosopher,

how readily you see the light when some one sets the lamp aglow!" he cried. "Yes, you are right. It was no supernatural ability which enabled him to leave his prison cell at will—even to make a mock of Death's imprisonment. Grigor was locked in prison—executed—but Vladimir, his twin and double, remained at large to carry on their work. But now he, too, is dead. I killed him when we rescued Mademoiselle Alice."

"One other thing, my Jules," Renouard demanded. "When they prepared to wed *Mademoiselle* to Satan, they made her walk all barefoot upon those burning stones. Was not that magic of a sort?"

De Grandin tweaked the needle-points of his mustache. "A juggler's trick," he answered. "That fire-walking, he is widely practised in some places, and always most successfully. The stones they use are porous as a sponge. They heat to incandescence quickly, but just as quickly they give off their heat. When they were laid upon the moistened sand these stones were cool enough to hold within your ungloved hand in thirty seconds. Some time was spent in mummery before they bade *Mademoiselle* to walk on them. By the time she stepped upon them they were cold as any money-lender's heart."

THE ship's bell beat out eight quick strokes. De Grandin dropped down from his seat upon the rail and tweaked the waxed tips of his mustache until they stood out like twin needles each side his small and thin-lipped mouth. "Come, if you please," he ordered us.

"Where?" asked Alice.

"To the chart room, of course. The land has disappeared"—he waved his hand toward the horizon where rolling blue water met a calm blue sky—"and we are now upon the high sea."

"Well?" demanded John.

"Well? Name of a little green pig with most deplorably bad manners! I shall say it is well. Do not you know that masters of ships on the high seas are empowered by the law to solemnize the rite of marriage?"

Something of the old Alice we had known in other days looked from the tired and careworn face above the collar of her traveling-coat as she replied: "I'm game;" then, eyes dropped demurely, and a slight flush in her cheeks, she added softly: "if John still wants me."

"DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony," read the captain from the Book of Common Prayer. . . . "If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else forever after hold his peace."

"Yes, *pardieu*, let him speak—and meet his death at Jules de Grandin's hands!" the little Frenchman murmured, thrusting one hand beneath his jacket where his automatic pistol rested in its shoulder holster.

"AND now, with due solemnity, let us consign this *sacré* thing unto the ocean, and may the sea never give up its dead!" de Grandin announced when John and Alice Davisson, Renouard and I came from the captain's sanctum, the tang of champagne still upon our lips. He raised his hand and a silvery object glittered in the last rays of the setting sun, flashed briefly through the air, then sank without a trace beneath the blue sea water. It was the marriage girdle of the Yezidees.

"Oh," Alice cried, "you've thrown away 'the luck of the Humes'!"

"Precisely so, *cherie*," he answered with a smile. "There are no longer any Humes, only Davissons. *Le bon Dieu* grant there may be many of them."

We have just returned from the christening of Alice's twin boys, Renouard de Grandin and Trowbridge Ingraham Davisson. The little villains howled right lustily when Doctor Bentley put the water on their heads, and:

"*Grand Dieu des porcs,* the Evil One dies hard in those small sinners!" said Jules de Grandin.

Ingraham, engrossed with ministerial duties in West Africa, was unable to be present, but the silver mugs he sent the youngsters are big enough to hold their milk for years to come.

As I write this, Renouard, de Grandin and Costello are very drunk in my consulting-room. I can hear Costello and Renouard laugh with that high-pitched cachinnation which only those far gone in liquor use at some droll anecdote which Jules de Grandin tells.

I think that I shall join them. Surely, there is one more drink left in the bottle.

[THE END]

The Little Gods Wait

By DONALD WANDREI

The little gods wait in the heart of the mountains,
  The little gods dream an apocalyptic dream;
The little gods sleep by faëry's phantom fountains,
  The little gods hide where the fen-fires gleam.

Their elders have promised them a day of returning,
  When post-historic revels will unfetter them,
When skies turn to flame in a universe burning,
  And ashes consume what the elders condemn.

The little gods then will tremble and waken
  And rub out the granules of sleep from their eyes;
When death has been captured and time overtaken,
  The little gods will answer their elders and rise.

The little gods will walk from hill and from highlands,
  And four-dimension vaults revolve and open wide;
They will spew from the sea and climb from sunken islands,
  From time-gulfs and planes of space they will glide.

The little gods wait in the heart of the mountains,
  The little gods dream their apocalyptic dream;
They sleep a long sleep by faëry's phantom fountains,
  And they hide in eery lands where the fen-fires gleam.

The Splendid Lie

By S. B. H. HURST

A brief story of the World War, and two old men who sought to comfort grieving humanity

A QUIET night in a valley of the Cotswold Hills in England, in December, 1917. A night like a Christmas card. Stars, snow on the ground and an old brick house that had seen a hundred thousand nights.

In the library of the house two elderly men sat at a desk. One was a famous classical scholar, professor in a university, the other, the owner of the house, Lord Daywater, a member of the War Cabinet.

"The guns in Flanders seem very far from this peaceful place," said the professor. "It's good to know that your boy will be home on leave in a few days!"

Lord Daywater smiled. Then he said, somewhat dryly, "Yes! And that reminds me! Two old fools—you and I—had better attend to a small matter of signing our names to a certain document! My boy insists upon it, and you can't blame him. Shall we do it now?"

The professor smiled.

"We have been a couple of fools," he answered. "To be brutally frank, we have been a couple of liars. We meant well, of course, but, all the same—liars! It did not matter so much about me. My folly did not seem so far out of place. I am only a university professor. But you! Only your unusual ability saved you from being asked to resign from the government. The opposition papers even said you ought to. I remember certain remarks about 'a ghost-hunter is hardly a man to expect sensible work from, especially in time of war!' . . . Yes, get out that document, and let's sign it!"

Lord Daywater opened a drawer and took out a typewritten document.

"It's only fair to the boy," he said. "You can't blame him for wishing to have proof of his father's sanity. He will have children some day. So he begged us to sign this. This admission that we lied to bring comfort to broken hearts! It will not be published until after we are dead. But, Dick, we did mean well. Couple of liars, but we have given comfort to thousands. Because all men crave knowledge of life beyond the grave—if there is any. You and I do not believe there is. It's just a harmless superstition. Yet all the world thinks we are ardent spiritualists, and thousands of poor women, wives, mothers and sweethearts have taken comfort because we have appeared in public and said that we *know* men live after death, *because we have proof of spirit communication!* Don't blame my level-headed boy for asking us to sign this admission. After our deaths he will publish it, in the interest of truth, in an effort to curb the superstition we have publicly endorsed. We were fools, and liars, too, but we have brought happiness to thousands! And I don't regret having lied. If I have helped to dry a tear I am rewarded!"

The professor nodded.

"Your boy was always such a logical little chap. Playful always, but sternly matter of fact under the playfulness—even when quite a little chap and I used to carry him around on my back. Do you remember how he loved to climb up to

the high window there—and knock on the pane and grin at us when we were in here playing chess? That window over there. . . . Great Scott!"

Tapping on the pane and smiling at the two old men was a young man in a torn and muddy uniform.

"He startled me," shouted the professor.

"He always loved to startle us!" the father shouted joyfully.

They rushed to the library door, into the hall, to the front door of the house. Lord Daywater flung it open, shouting.

"He must have got earlier leave than he expected. And he wanted to surprize us as he did when he was little—tapping on the window! Bet you a quid he is hiding from us, in his old way!"

He shouted into the night.

"Bob! Bob! Come in, you young rascal!"

The light wind of a winter night murmured over the snow.

"Come on!" shouted Daywater joyfully to the professor. "We'll catch him and roll him in the snow as we used to do! The young tease. You run around the house that way, and I will run this—just as we used to do! Playful young rascal, but we two old men will catch him and roll him in the snow!"

The professor ran one way, Daywater panted the other. They met at the back of the house.

"Did you see him?" shouted the father.

"No!" puffed the classical scholar. "He dodged us, as he always did! Bet he's sitting in the library laughing at us. Come on back, Day!"

The two old men plowed through the snow, back to the front door. They heard the telephone in the library ringing violently.

"Damn that phone!" panted Daywater as they rushed in. "But where's the boy?"

"Hiding some place," laughed the professor. "Answer that phone, old man."

Lord Daywater lifted the receiver.

"Yes!" he said. "Oh, a telegram for me. Yes, read it!"

He turned to the professor.

"A wire for me down at the village. I told the operator to read it to me. While he is doing it—it may be important, you know—go and find that boy of mine, will you? Tell him he'll get spanked for playing tricks on two staid and distinguished gentlemen!"

The operator in the village began to read the message. Lord Daywater listened.

"We regret to report that your son, Captain the Honorable Robert Daywater, was killed in action three days ago. We would have advised you earlier, but the heavy bombardment made communication difficult. The war council extends its sympathy."

Dust

By EDNA GOIT BRINTNALL

A brief story of a girl who lay in bed and rested for the first time in her life

AT FIRST, Nellie thought it was all only a dream. There had been no stinging summons from the rusty little alarm clock, no petulant call from her mother's room down the long flight of stairs. Yet she could hear her mother moving about in the kitchen and her father's low answers. Miraculously enough, they were not quarreling.

She lay very still and tried to readjust herself. She was very tired and it was pleasant, unbelievably pleasant, to just lie quietly and pretend she was asleep.

It was high time she was getting father's breakfast, and a rather pathetic breakfast it would be. Just the two of them always. Mother usually had a headache and Nellie took breakfast up to her on a tray. Not a tray with a rose clinging lovingly to the curl of a long crystal vase, but roses were expensive and not to be thought of even in midsummer. Mother usually ate her breakfast and turned over discontentedly and went back to sleep. Then Nellie hurried downstairs and dusted the living-room. Mother was most particular about the living-room. Beyond the living-room nothing much mattered.

Nellie sensed that she was lying on the couch in the alcove off the living-room. It was stuffy; she could smell the dust on the "porteers" and the heavy odor of the afghan couch cover. There were six strips to the couch cover, two tan, two rust-red and two faded blue, alternating and strung together loosely with coarse tan twine.

Sometimes she and Wilbur sat there at night and Wilbur held her hand and kissed her (she skipped over the thought hurriedly), but she had never before lain quietly on its spongy softness. Mother spoke of the alcove as the cozy corner.

It was nice.

Even the sheet was over her face, just as she always put it (even in her own hard little bed up under the roof) to keep off the wind that sucked down through the flue in the chimney.

She liked her room, though it had nothing in it besides a very old marble-top dresser shabbily painted white, and an old mirror of her grandmother's, that once had been resplendent with shining gold leaf. It was nothing much to look at now, after she had painted the clusters of grapes along the sides. Blobs of paint made pimples on the sides of the grapes, unpleasant even to think about. The bed was thin and white and iron. It was cold in winter—like the rest of the room, and hot in summer.

In the winter there was no heat. The tiny sheet-iron stove in the corner was not good to look at, but no one bothered to take it down. It was painfully inadequate against the winter winds that threw themselves off the lake and beat frantically against the eight tiny windows.

Only half of the woodwork was white. Nellie had intended it all to be white, but one can hardly judge the limits of a quart of paint. Even the white part was not all white—just a muddy gray where the deep brown of the old woodwork showed through—and now only two of

the windows would open. The paint held them quite securely, making the room like a furnace during the hot summer nights.

Even at that Nellie liked the room.

There were eight more of such rooms strung along the row toward the street corner. Nellie often wondered what they looked like—if they were as warm and as cold as hers, and if the wallpapers were as pretty as hers. Nellie loved the wallpaper. She had selected it herself. It was pale green with broad silver trellises fairly bursting with pink roses, roses that hung over her bed in joyous profusion. So low was the ceiling that she could fancy herself lying in bed and merely reaching out one slim arm and gathering handfuls to her thin young breasts.

Looking at the flowers, she forgot the paint, and the lack of curtains at the windows didn't bother her any more. She had wanted Swiss curtains with pink dots and frilled tie-backs, but as her mother convinced her—curtains were not necessary up so high from the street. No one saw.

As the door opened softly, she lay very still. It was too nice for just a little longer.

She wondered why her father hadn't gone to work, wrenching himself into his coat, pulling his hat down viciously over his bespectacled eyes and slamming the door until the colored glass fairly rattled in its casing.

From the kitchen she could hear the mother's voice as a general directing his army.

"Be careful now, with that dust-rag. Wipe off the window-sills and the top of the piano and the rungs of the chairs!"

So Father was dusting!

She would have loved to peek out from under the sheet, just to have seen him, but it was all too delicious.

Mother getting breakfast! Father dusting!

Too delicious just to lie all warm and comfortable and let some one else do something.

Her mother came through the dining-room and stood in the doorway.

"We can put those roses in the green vase," she was saying to her father, "two whole dozen roses—from the Goodmans' around the corner!"

Two dozen roses—it was beyond comprehension!

Soon she would stir herself and get up and wash the vase—'way down at the bottom so that no brown line would show—but not now—no, not now!

She thought about the house—stiff with red, dark red brick and a jutting porch that went up stiffly as if making a long nose at the shabby cellar beneath. It had cutwork and balls and scrolls all painted red, dark red like the brick.

The living-room was nice. Mother always spoke of it that way. There was the onyx table with a bronze statue on it, by the front window—the bronze lamp with the big red shade on the glass-top table by the morris chair. There were green over-curtains—scant, very scant, it was true, and not quite covering the coarse lace edgings of the scrim curtains underneath, but Mother had made them in a hurry and her sense of measurement was not always accurate. Still they looked nice.

The piano was rosewood. Even Father was proud of the piano, though there had been weeks of wrangling and bitter biting argument over it, but Mother won. Mother always did.

Just as she had about the house. Father had wanted a house in the country. A

house that stood by itself and didn't have to be propped up by seven others, all alike in a row like alphabet blocks. A house that had sides to it that one could see and not only just one stern high front. Windows that looked wide to the sun and not into a gray court that grew darker and darker as it neared the dining-room windows.

Perhaps that was why the dining-room was rarely dusted. No one could see dust in the dining-room, even in midday,—that is, no one but Father. Father could see and sometimes he wrote the word *Dust* in a big scrawling hand across the shelf of the high golden-oak sideboard. It always made Mother angry—which he knew it would. Often Nellie saw it before Mother did, though she was not so tall; and that saved a row.

Nellie hated rows, but Father and Mother seemed to enjoy them. Father always telling about his mother's housekeeping and Mother flinging back about never having a dime to call her own.

Often Nellie could hear them below her—tense bitter voices snarling at each other in the darkness.

But when callers came Mother and Father took on, in some mysterious fashion, the niceness of the living-room. Mother was proud of the Oriental rugs and Father even praised the piano.

Nellie didn't stir. She heard Mother's steps close beside her—very close beside her. She was speaking.

"I think the roses look nicest here, don't you? We can put the rest of the flowers here—but the roses *are* lovely!"

"She liked roses," said the father.

"I like roses too, but with never a dime——" She stopped, suddenly; her father said nothing.

"Her graduating-dress was a bit too small, but I split it down the back. Looks real nice against——" her mother continued.

"She has real pretty hair." Her father seemed very close to her. He was praising her. Tears flooded to her eyes, but she kept her lips closed tight. She wanted to hear more—just a very little more.

"I had real pretty hair, too, once—you used to say so yourself—but what with scrimping and washing and ironing and standing over a hot stove and raising a——" Her mother hesitated.

"She wasn't exactly thankless," her father said, slowly, as if supplying the word. "Maybe we shouldn't have said she had to marry Wilbur. Wilbur is a nice fellow, but maybe she didn't just fancy him—girls are sometimes that way. Maybe, if we hadn't just forced her too far, she woulda got used to the idea slow-like and not run out into the street like a wild thing and get runned over by a fire engine."

Nellie felt her mother's breath freeze against her lips.

"Don't you ever let me hear you say those words again—not to anybody, any time," she said firmly. "After all, she was running out to see where the fire was and that's how it all happened."

"I guess you're right," said the father.

"Well, I've got all the food ready and most of the flowers set up and you bettter go up and get a fresh collar on and your black gloves ready. The man ought to be here now any minute and you can help lift her."

Her mother came close to her and lifted the sheet. Nellie kept her eyes tightly closed and waited.

"She looks real nice," she said almost defiantly, "just like she was sleeping."

"Yes," said her father, "just like she was sleeping."

Her mother laid the sheet back over her face. They tiptoed away.

THE heavy scent of roses came back to Nellie pleasantly. She wished the "porteers" didn't smell like dust.

So close the roses seemed, as if she could reach out one slender arm and gather them to her thin young bosom.

She was very tired. She wondered about the alarm clock. Perhaps there had never been any alarm clock. Perhaps she had only been dreaming.

It was nice of the Goodmans to send roses to her mother. They were nice people—even her mother and father were nice. A nice living-room it was. A nice couch, comfortable, restful. . . .

Even Wilbur was nice. . . .

She gave a thin, peaceful litttle sigh—the room was dusted—somewhere Father was putting on a clean collar and some black gloves—somewhere Mother, well—it was just all—too—nice. . . .

Nellie slept.

House of the Lizard

By HAROLD WARD

The newspaper reporter underwent a ghastly experience in that house built on the quicksands of a swamp

THE place was little more than a dugout set in the brow of the hill. The exposed portion was of limestone, stained and yellowed with age. A creeping vine, tangled and untrimmed, clung tenaciously to the fissures in the rocky wall alongside and flung its rebellious tendrils across the bit of roof in a riotous mass. The afternoon's rain had covered everything with moisture; above the swamp rose a foggy, stinking vapor. Located at the end of a prolongation of the mainland, the miserable habitation reminded one of the abiding-place of some poisonous denizen of the swampy morass which surrounded it on three sides. The gathering darkness was dropping down over everything like a black mantle; yet there was still light enough for me to get a good view of the old man who stood in the doorway and blinked at me drowsily as if just awakened from a sound sleep.

I stated my mission. The old man, his huge head cocked to one side, chuckled throatily. Short, pot-bellied, bandy-legged and fat, his eyes droopy and heavy-lidded, his lipless mouth a great slit extending, it seemed, almost from ear to ear, he reminded me, somehow, of a big frog that had escaped from the near-by muck and assumed the form of a man. Now, as he spoke for the first time, his voice added to the illusion, for it was deep and rumbling.

"Newspaper man, eh?" he gurgled in his hoarse bass. "Sent down to get a feature story for your Sunday paper, eh?" He chuckled again. "Maybe I——"

He stopped in the middle of the sentence as if struck by a sudden thought.

"Come in," he commanded, throwing the door open a trifle wider. "Maybe there has been some queer goings-on around here—things that seem odd to

other people. But me—I'm used to 'em."

He led the way into the single, tiny room. It was gloomy as a tomb. Feeling his way, he scratched a match and lighted a candle, which he stuck in a sconce above the huge, stone fireplace. Its feeble glare threw the interior into a sort of semi-darkness. As I took the seat he indicated, I glanced about. Two chairs, a rude table and a pallet of straw in the corner were all the furniture the room contained. On the farther wall were a number of box-like shelves; strangely enough, they reminded me of crypts.

For a single instant the old man stood gazing at me. Then, with a word of apology, he lighted a second candle from the flame of the first and, pulling up a trapdoor in the floor, descended into the cellar. He returned almost immediately with a platter of cold meat, half a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine.

" 'Tain't likely you've et, seein's you said your car broke down a ways back," he rumbled, placing the frugal meal on the table before me.

To tell the truth, I was hungry; for, as he had said, I had hurried on account of the breakdown. And, too, I wanted to get back to the city to keep an appointment.

He sat in silence until I had completed my repast. Then, my pipe filled and lighted, I turned to him.

"I——"

He stopped me with a gesture.

"Hear it?" he whispered. "It's at it again."

I listened. With the coming of night the noises of the day had died out. Now there was silence—silence unbroken save for a peculiar *cl-u-u-u-unk . . . cl-u-u-u-unk . . . cl-u-u-u-unk.* It sounded like the efforts of a plumber to force a sink with a vacuum pump. For a moment it puzzled me.

"It's the swamp," the old man whispered tremulously. "Nights like this you can hear it plainer than when there's a moon. It's getting closer an' closer—just eatin' an' suckin' away at the ground the way a cancer works on human flesh. It used to be more'n a quarter of a mile away. Now it's almost here."

For a moment I smoked in silence. There was something about the old fellow—something sinister, foreboding; yet I was forced to admit to myself that he had been courteous enough. I glanced across the table at him. His face, half in the shadow, was more frog-like and repulsive than ever. He made a peculiar clucking noise. A small lizard darted out from a crack in the floor and, running up the old man's trousers leg, perched itself upon his breast. He clucked again. The creature's head raised; it seemed to balance itself upon the end of its tail and its hind legs. The yellow and light green of its belly writhed and twisted snakishly as the old man stroked the top of its head with his stubby forefinger.

"This one's the tamest of the bunch," he went on as if breaking into his own chain of thought. "See her little collar?"

He set the reptile atop the table, where it lay blinking its tiny eyes at me contentedly. Lizards and snakes and spiders and the like have always been especially repugnant to me. To touch one of the creatures invariably sends a chill down my spine. Yet for the sake of the coming story, I held a crumb of meat between my thumb and forefinger and allowed the green-coated horror to nibble at it daintily. Then, conquering my nerves a bit more, I made shift to examine the thin circlet of metal about the tiny neck. Corroded, covered with greenish mold, there were

yet traces of engraving upon it. Interested in spite of myself, I bent my head for a better view of it.

It was a woman's wedding ring, without a doubt.

The old man, noting my interest, blinked his froggish eyes excitedly.

"It was a woman's finger ring, all right," he explained, sensing my unspoken question. "I found it layin' outside one day——"

He dropped his voice to a rumbling whisper.

" 'Twas on a bit of bone washed up by the swamp," he went on. "Maybe it was Laura's in the beginning—I always call her Laura — the lizard, I mean. She knows her name and answers to it. That was the name of Laspard's wife. Maybe Laura, here, is her."

He scratched the lizard's head again with his stubby forefinger.

"She was a little thing, then, and the ring slipped down over her little head fine. It's a tight fit, now, but she doesn't seem to mind it."

The lizard cocked her head sideways as if listening. The old man stopped suddenly, and he, too, listened for an instant.

"She hears the swamp calling," he said in a low tone. "It's suckin' an' eatin' all the time—gettin' closer an' closer."

The atmosphere, the darkened interior —everything—was beginning to get on my nerves. I shuddered in spite of myself.

"The story they tell about this bit of swamp land?" I reminded him gently.

He shrugged his pudgy shoulders.

"I was just coming to that," he answered. "You see, Laura sort of fits in."

Again he stopped. From a distant corner came a rasping squeak. I turned my head in time to see another lizard dart across the stone floor and disappear in the darkness. Laura slid from the table onto the old man's lap and thence to the floor. An instant later she joined her companion in the corner.

"I have to put up with 'em," the old man ruminated. "And maybe they're as human as you and me."

He pushed the wine-bottle across the table to me. As an act of courtesy I drank.

"This was his house—the house of Pierre Laspard," he said suddenly. "That is, all that's left of it. A storm took the rest years ago."

He hesitated an instant. Then, as I made no response: "It was here—right here in this very room—that he killed 'em: Laura, his wife, and John Davis, her lover. They were sitting in that very chair you're sittin' in, she on his lap, her arms about him, kissing and loving, when Pierre Laspard came in suddenly and caught them. He shot them."

I stirred uneasily. The old man chuckled mirthlessly.

"Their blood was on the floor where your feet are. I scrubbed most of it up, but it sunk into the stone. You can see it when the light's good."

The candle guttered, almost went out from some faint draft. I felt a chill pass over me. The dancing light threw grotesque shadows upon the walls. The old man, hunched over the table, looked more frog-like than ever. His voice, dropping to a rumbling whisper, took on the deep bass of a bullfrog.

"He killed himself here in this room, too," he said suddenly. "They say that he comes back—that he returns to the scene of his crime every night—that he is tied to this bit of old stone house until the swamp swallows it up and releases him."

I filled and lighted my pipe nervously. The old man's head dropped to his breast. His eyes closed as if he slept.

"Cl-u-u-u-unk . . . cl-u-u-u-unk . . ."

It was the swamp. The lizards squeaked in the darkness. The old man stirred from his revery.

"Hear it?" he questioned. "Laura hears it." He held up his finger for silence. "It's gettin' closer an' closer—nearer and nearer to old Pierre Laspard. It won't be long now.

"He was an old man, Pierre Laspard was," he said, changing the subject suddenly. "Much too old for a girl like Laura La Rue. But he loved her and with his money he always got what he wanted. She was a beautiful girl—the belle of the countryside. All of the young fellows were after her, but she'd have nothing to do with them, loving only one—a gay young blade named John Davis. She and Davis were secretly engaged. But in those days the word of the parents was law. They forced her to marry old Pierre Laspard and his money. And she—she obeyed in spite of her love for John Davis.

"You can't keep young love apart. One day Pierre Laspard went away expecting to be gone for a day or two. He returned unexpectedly. He found his wife sitting on her lover's lap. He had his gun with him. You can imagine the rest, for Pierre Laspard was a hot-tempered man in spite of his years."

Again he bowed his head in thought. Then:

"He carried the bodies across the fields and threw them into the swamp. It was the same then as it is now, always sucking and dragging and pulling like a live thing. It's the quicksand as does it. It swallowed 'em up. Laspard gave it out that they had run away together. People wagged their heads and said nothing, knowing as they did, how Laura and her lover had been carrying on behind old Pierre's back."

"Cl-u-u-u-nk . . . cl-u-u-u-unk . . ."

"Hear it?" he whispered. "It's getting closer all the time—just gnawing away at the ground in order to get at old Pierre."

Again I had a feeling of coldness. Involuntarily I shuddered. The old man leaned closer.

"Old Pierre couldn't stand it," he went on. "One day they found him sittin' in that chair you're sittin' in. His throat was cut from ear to ear. He had committed suicide.

"On the table, here, he'd left a confession telling how he had killed them."

He rose to his feet and stood leaning over the table, his fat, pasty face gray with terror. Great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead.

"She wasn't dead when he threw her into the swamp!" he said in an awed whisper. "Think of it, she wasn't dead!

"She recovered consciousness just before the mud and ooze sucked her down. There she lay, just her face and breast above the water, the blood flowing from the gaping wound in her white breast and coloring the wet, soggy sand around her, and cursed him—cursed Pierre Laspard, the man who had killed her.

" 'It'll get you!' she shrieked with her dying breath. 'It will get you just as it's getting me! You can't get away from it, Pierre Laspard! Try as you will, you can't escape it! It will get you. I'm coming back—John and I—to see that my curse comes true! It will get you . . . suck you in . . . in . . . in . . .'

"Then the swamp gave a heave and a gurgle and she was gone. But the curse still remains."

The old man dropped back into his chair again, trembling like a leaf in the wind. Then, for the first time, I saw it.

There was a white scar across his throat—a scar extending amongst the folds of fat from ear to ear!

Suddenly the full horror of the thing swept over me! This man—this fat, paunchy, frog-like thing with the bandy legs—was the shade of Pierre Lespard!

I ATTEMPTED to leap to my feet. I was chained to the floor as by invisible bands. I tried to shriek. My mouth was dry and parched. I could make no sound.

"Cl-l-u-u-u-unk . . . cl-u-u-u-unk . . ."

The sound was closer now. It was almost at the door. The floor was writhing and twisting and squirming as the water undermined it. In the corner the lizards squeaked excitedly. The old man was on his feet now, his arms extended toward the swamp in an attitude of devotion.

"Hear it? Hear it?" he croaked exultingly. "It comes—it comes for me. The curse will soon be ended."

Stone was grinding upon stone. The front of the place fell with a terrific crash. I looked out through the opening upon a starless, moonless night. Another grinding! A smashing crash! More stone fell. And still I sat there, unable to move.

A portion of the hillside fell as the water undermined it. Then the swamp was upon me. The sticky, oozy flood closed about my legs. I was drawn down . . . down . . . down. . . .

Then consciousness left me.

I WAS awakened by the feel of arms beneath my shoulders. I opened my eyes. A man was standing, waist-deep, in the mud. Naked, his muscular arms were about me and he was straining to drag me out of the vortex that was sucking me in.

I heard a woman's voice.

"Hurry!" she seemed to say. "The time is almost up!"

I managed to turn my head. Tall, slender, her white skin showing plainly against the darkness of the night, she stood close beside me and stretched forth her hand. My fingers grasped hers. She gave a pull. The man gave a mighty heave. The sticky flood groaned and sighed. Then I felt myself being dragged to safety.

From the swamp came a shriek. It was bass and throaty and rumbling. It sounded like the thunder of a bullfrog that has been frightened. Yet, too, it had the tone of a man who has just escaped from hell.

"Laura! Laura! I come! I come! The swamp has taken me at last!"

The woman squeaked like a lizard. The soft hand was jerked from my grasp. Then came oblivion again.

IT WAS daylight when I awoke. The sun was shining brightly through the foliage atop the hill. For a moment I lay there. Then recollection swept over me and I leaped to my feet.

Of the old stone house there was not a trace. The swamp swept along the rocky base of the hill.

"WHAT sort of story are you trying to feed me?" the Sunday editor demanded angrily, glaring at me over his glasses. "Have you been on another bender? You promised me that the last one would be——"

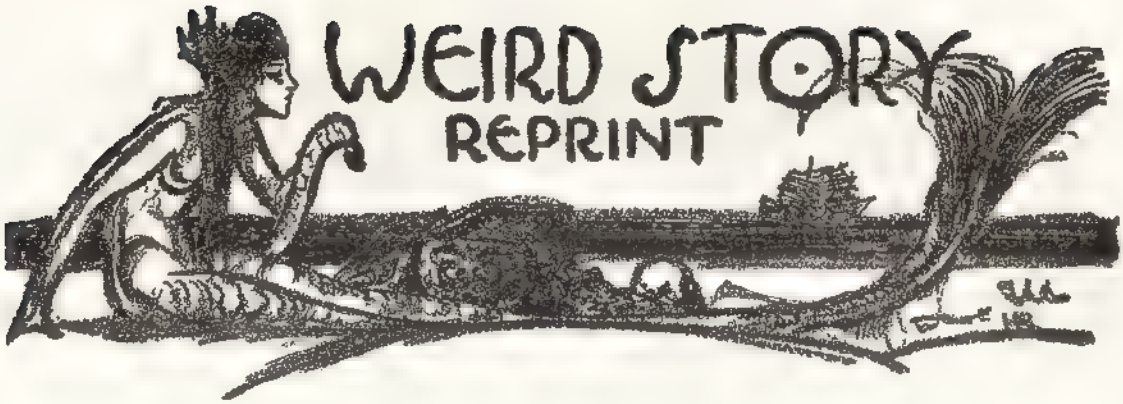
I interrupted him with a gesture. Taking something from my pocket, I handed it to him.

"I found this in my hand when I woke up," I answered. "I must have jerked it from the girl's finger when she pulled her hand from my grasp."

The Sunday editor swore fluently as he examined the thing that I had handed to him.

"She had to leave me when the curse was fulfilled," I went on.

The thing I had handed him was a woman's wedding ring. Green and corroded though it was, inside one could still see the engraved initials, *"L. L."*



Frankenstein

By MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

The Story Thus Far

ROBERT WALTON, captain of a ship seeking a passage through the Arctic Ocean, saw a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass over the ice field to the north. In it sat a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature.

The next morning, after the ice had broken, he rescued from an ice-floe another man, greatly emaciated. Only one of his dogs remained alive, for he had been marooned for some time.

The man was Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist, who related to Captain Walton the incredible story of his life and how he came to be on the ice-floe.

Frankenstein had lived in Geneva with his father and his adopted sister, Elizabeth, to whom he was betrothed. His father sent him to school at Ingolstadt with his chum, Henry Clerval. There he progressed in his studies of natural science to such a point that he learned to create life.

Without taking Clerval into his secret, Frankenstein created a monster, eight feet tall and human in appearance, taking his materials from graveyards, slaughter-houses and dissecting-rooms. The monster was so terrible to look upon that Frankenstein fled from it, and the monster escaped.

Abandoned by its creator, the monster made its way to the vicinity of Frankenstein's home, where he murdered Frankenstein's younger brother, William, making it appear that Justine Moritz, a friend of the family, had committed the murder. Justine was convicted and sentenced to death, while Frankenstein, knowing that if he told the truth he would be considered a lunatic, was forced to keep silence.

CHAPTER 9

NOTHING is more painful to the human mind than, after the feelings have been worked up by a quick succession of events, the dead calmness of inaction and certainty which follows, and deprives the soul both of hope and fear. Justine died; she rested; and I was alive. The blood flowed freely in my veins, but a weight of despair and remorse pressed on my heart, which nothing could remove. Sleep fled from my eyes; I wandered like

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May

an evil spirit, for I had committed deeds of mischief beyond description horrible, and more, much more (I persuaded myself), was yet behind. Yet my heart overflowed with kindness, and the love of virtue. I had begun life with benevolent intentions, and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in practise, and make myself useful to my fellow-beings. Now all was blasted: instead of that serenity of conscience, which allowed me to look back upon the past with self-satisfaction, and from thence to gather promise of new hopes, I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe.

This state of mind preyed upon my health, which had perhaps never entirely recovered from the first shock it had sustained. I shunned the face of man; all sound of joy or complacency was torture to me; solitude was my only consolation—deep, dark, death-like solitude.

My father observed with pain the alteration perceptible in my disposition and habits, and endeavored by arguments deduced from the feelings of his serene conscience and guiltless life, to inspire me with fortitude, and awaken in me the courage to dispel the dark cloud which brooded over me. "Do you think, Victor," said he, "that I do not suffer also? No one could love a child more than I loved your brother" (tears came into his eyes as he spoke); "but is it not a duty to the survivors, that we should refrain from augmenting their unhappiness by an appearance of immoderate grief? It is also a duty owed to yourself; for excessive sorrow prevents improvement or enjoyment, or even the discharge of daily usefulness, without which no man is fit for society."

This advice, although good, was totally inapplicable to my case; I should have been the first to hide my grief, and console my friends, if remorse had not mingled its bitterness, and terror its alarm with my other sensations. Now I could only answer my father with a look of despair, and endeavor to hide myself from his view.

About this time we retired to our house at Belrive. This change was particularly agreeable to me. The shutting of the gates regularly at ten o'clock, and the impossibility of remaining on the lake after that hour, had rendered our residence within the walls of Geneva very irksome to me. I was not free. Often, after the rest of the family had retired for the night, I took the boat, and passed many hours upon the water. Sometimes, with my sails set, I was carried by the wind; and sometimes, after rowing into the middle of the lake, I left the boat to pursue its own course, and gave way to my own miserable reflections. I was often tempted, when all was at peace around me, and I the only unquiet thing that wandered restless in a scene so beautiful and heavenly—if I except some bat, or the frogs, whose harsh and interrupted croaking was heard only when I approached the shore—often, I say, I was tempted to plunge into the silent lake, that the waters might close over me and my calamities for ever. But I was restrained, when I thought of the heroic and suffering Elizabeth, whom I tenderly loved, and whose existence was bound up in mine. I thought also of my father and surviving brother: should I by my base desertion leave them exposed and unprotected to the malice of the fiend whom I had let loose among them?

At these moments I wept bitterly, and wished that peace would revisit my mind only that I might afford them consolation and happiness. But that could not be. Remorse extinguished every hope. I had been the author of unalterable evils; and I lived in daily fear lest the monster whom I had created should perpetrate some new

wickedness. I had an obscure feeling that all was not over, and that he would still commit some signal crime, which by its enormity should almost efface the recollection of the past. There was always scope for fear, so long as anything I loved remained behind.

My abhorrence of this fiend can not be conceived. When I thought of him, I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became inflamed, and I ardently wished to extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed. When I reflected on his crimes and malice, my hatred and revenge burst all bounds of moderation. I would have made a pilgrimage to the highest peak of the Andes, could I, when there, have precipitated him to their base. I wished to see him again, that I might wreak the utmost extent of abhorrence on his head, and avenge the deaths of William and Justine.

Our house was the house of mourning. My father's health was deeply shaken by the horror of the recent events. Elizabeth was sad and desponding; she no longer took delight in her ordinary occupations; all pleasure seemed to her sacrilege toward the dead; eternal wo and tears she then thought was the just tribute she should pay to innocence so blasted and destroyed. She was no longer that happy creature, who in earlier youth wandered with me on the banks of the lake, and talked with ecstasy of our future prospects. The first of those sorrows which are sent to wean us from the earth, had visited her, and its dimming influence quenched her dearest smiles.

"When I reflect, my dearest cousin," said she, "on the miserable death of Justine Moritz, I no longer see the world and its works as they before appeared to me. Before, I looked upon the accounts of vice and injustice, that I read in books or heard from others, as tales of ancient days, or imaginary evils; at least they were remote, and more familiar to reason than to the imagination; but now misery has come home, and men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood. Yet I am certainly unjust. Everybody believed that poor girl to be guilty; and if she could have committed the crime for which she suffered, assuredly she would have been the most depraved of human creatures. For the sake of a few jewels, to have murdered the son of her benefactor and friend, a child whom she had nursed from its birth, and appeared to love as if it had been her own! I could not consent to the death of any human being; but certainly I should have thought such a creature unfit to remain in the society of men. But she was innocent. I know, I feel she was innocent; you are of the same opinion, and that confirms me. Alas! Victor, when falsehood can look so like the truth, who can assure themselves of certain happiness? I feel as if I were walking on the edge of a precipice, towards which thousands are crowding, and endeavoring to plunge me into the abyss. William and Justine were assassinated, and the murderer escapes; he walks about the world free, and perhaps respected. But even if I were condemned to suffer on the scaffold for the same crimes, I would not change places with such a wretch."

I listened to this discourse with the extremest agony. I, not in deed, but in effect, was the true murderer.

Elizabeth read my anguish in my countenance, and kindly taking my hand, said, "My dearest friend, you must calm yourself. These events have affected me, God knows how deeply; but I am not so wretched as you are. There is an expression of despair, and sometimes of revenge, in your countenance, that makes me tremble. Dear Victor, banish these dark passions. Remember the friends

around you, who center all their hopes in you. Have we lost the power of rendering you happy? Ah! while we love—while we are true to each other, here in this land of peace and beauty, your native country, we may reap every tranquil blessing—what can disturb our peace?"

And could not such words from her whom I fondly prized before every other gift of fortune, suffice to chase away the fiend that lurked in my heart? Even as she spoke I drew near to her, as if in terror; lest at that very moment the destroyer had been near to rob me of her.

Thus not the tenderness of friendship, nor the beauty of earth, nor of heaven, could redeem my soul from wo: the very accents of love were ineffectual. I was encompassed by a cloud which no beneficial influence could penetrate. The wounded deer dragging its fainting limbs to some untrodden brake, there to gaze upon the arrow which had pierced it, and to die—was but a type of me.

Sometimes I could cope with the sullen despair that overwhelmed me: but sometimes the whirlwind passions of my soul drove me to seek, by bodily exercise and by change of place, some relief from my intolerable sensations. It was during an access of this kind that I suddenly left my home, and bending my steps towards the near Alpine valleys, sought in the magnificence, the eternity of such scenes, to forget myself and my ephemeral, because human, sorrows. My wanderings were directed towards the valley of Chamounix. I had visited it frequently during my boyhood. Six years had passed since then: *I* was a wreck—but nought had changed in those savage and enduring scenes.

I PERFORMED the first part of my journey on horseback. I afterwards hired a mule, as the more sure-footed, and least liable to receive injury on these rugged roads. The weather was fine: it was about the middle of August, nearly two months after the death of Justine; that miserable epoch from which I dated all my wo.

The weight upon my spirit was sensibly lightened as I plunged yet deeper in the ravine of Arve. The immense mountains and precipices that overhung me on every side—the sound of the river raging among the rocks, and the dashing of the waterfalls around, spoke of a power mighty as Omnipotence—and I ceased to fear, or to bend before any being less almighty than that which had created and ruled the elements, here displayed in their most terrific guise. Still, as I ascended higher, the valley assumed a more magnificent and astonishing character. Ruined castles hanging on the precipices of piny mountains; the impetuous Arve, and cottages every here and there peeping forth from among the trees, formed a scene of singular beauty. But it was augmented and rendered sublime by the mighty Alps, whose white and shining pyramids and domes towered above all, as belonging to another earth, the habitations of another race of beings.

I passed the bridge of Pélissier, where the ravine, which the river forms, opened before me, and I began to ascend the mountain that overhangs it. Soon after, I entered the valley of Chamounix. This valley is more wonderful and sublime, but not so beautiful and picturesque as that of Servox, through which I had just passed. The high and snowy mountains were its immediate boundaries; but I saw no more ruined castles and fertile fields. Immense glaciers approached the road; I heard the rumbling thunder of the falling avalanche, and marked the smoke of its passage. Mont Blanc, the supreme and magnificent Mont Blanc, raised itself from the surrounding *aiguilles,* and its tremendous *dôme* overlooked the valley.

At length I arrived at the village of

Chamounix. Exhaustion succeeded to the extreme fatigue both of body and of mind which I had endured. For a short space of time I remained at the window, watching the pallid lightnings that played above Mont Blanc, and listening to the rushing of the Arve, which pursued its noisy way beneath. The same lulling sounds acted as a lullaby to my too keen sensations: when I placed my head upon my pillow, sleep crept over me; I felt it as it came, and blest the giver of oblivion.

CHAPTER 10

I SPENT the following day roaming through the valley. I stood beside the sources of the Arveiron, which take their rise in a glacier that with slow pace is advancing down from the summit of the hills to barricade the valley. The abrupt sides of vast mountains were before me; the icy wall of the glacier overhung me; a few shattered pines were scattered around; and the solemn silence of this glorious presence-chamber of imperial Nature was broken only by the brawling waves, or the fall of some vast fragment, the thunder sound of the avalanche, or the cracking reverberated along the mountains of the accumulated ice, which, through the silent working of immutable laws, was ever and anon rent and torn, as if it had been but a plaything in their hands.

These sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving. They elevated me from all littleness of feeling; and although they did not remove my grief, they subdued and tranquillized it. In some degree, also, they diverted my mind from the thoughts over which it had brooded for the last month. I retired to rest at night; my slumbers, as it were, waited on and ministered to by the assemblance of grand shapes which I had contemplated during the day. They congregated round me; the unstained snowy mountain-top, the glittering pinnacle, the pine woods, and ragged bare ravine; the eagle, soaring amidst the clouds—they all gathered round me, and bade me be at peace.

Where had they fled when the next morning I awoke? Dark melancholy clouded my every thought. The rain was pouring in torrents, and thick mists hid the summits of the mountains, so that I even saw not the faces of those mighty friends. Still I would penetrate their misty veil, and seek them in their cloudy retreats. What were rain and storm to me? My mule was brought to the door, and I resolved to ascend to the summit of Montanvert. I remembered the effect that the view of the tremendous and ever-moving glacier had produced upon my mind when I first saw it. It had then filled me with a sublime ecstasy that gave wings to the soul, and allowed it to soar from the obscure world to light and joy. The sight of the awful and majestic in nature had indeed always the effect of solemnizing my mind, and causing me to forget the passing cares of life. I determined to go without a guide, for I was well acquainted with the path, and the presence of another would destroy the solitary grandeur of the scene.

The ascent is precipitous, but the path is cut into continual and short windings, which enable you to surmount the perpendicularity of the mountain. It is a scene terrifically desolate. In a thousand spots the traces of the winter avalanche may be perceived, where trees lie broken and strewed on the ground; some entirely destroyed, others bent, leaning upon the jutting rocks of the mountain, or transversely upon other trees. The path, as you ascend higher, is intersected by ravines of snow, down which stones continually roll from above; one of them is particularly dangerous, as the slightest

sound, such as even speaking in a loud voice, produces a concussion of air sufficient to draw destruction upon the head of the speaker. The pines are not tall or luxuriant, but they are somber, and add an air of severity to the scene.

I looked on the valley beneath; vast mists were rising from the rivers which ran through it, and curling in thick wreaths around the opposite mountains, whose summits were hid in the uniform clouds, while rain poured from the dark sky, and added to the melancholy impression I received from the objects around me. Alas! why does man boast of sensibilities superior to those apparent in the brute; it only renders them more necessary beings. If our impulses were confined to hunger, thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free; but now we are moved by every wind that blows, and a chance word or scene that that word may convey to us.

It was nearly noon when I arrived at the top of the ascent. For some time I sat upon the rock that overlooks the sea of ice. A mist covered both that and the surrounding mountains. Presently a breeze dissipated the cloud, and I descended upon the glacier. The surface is very uneven, rising like the waves of a troubled sea, descending low, and interspersed by rifts that sink deep. The field of ice is almost a league in width, but I spent nearly two hours in crossing it. The opposite mountain is a bare perpendicular rock. From the side where I now stood Montanvert was exactly opposite, at the distance of a league; and above it rose Mont Blanc, in awful majesty.

I remained in a recess of the rock, gazing on this wonderful and stupendous scene. The sea, or rather the vast river of ice, wound among its dependent mountains, whose aerial summits hung over its recesses. Their icy and glittering peaks shone in the sunlight over the clouds. My heart, which was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy; I exclaimed—"Wandering spirits, if indeed ye wander, and do not rest in your narrow beds, allow me this faint happiness, or take me, as your companion, away from the joys of life."

As I said this, I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution; his stature, also, as he approached, seemed to exceed that of man. I was troubled: a mist came over my eyes, and I felt a faintness seize me; but I was quickly restored by the cold gale of the mountains. I perceived, as the shape came nearer (sight tremendous and abhorred!) that it was the wretch whom I had created. I trembled with rage and horror, resolving to wait his approach, and then close with him in mortal combat. He approached; his countenance bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes. But I scarcely observed this; rage and hatred had at first deprived me of utterance, and I recovered only to overwhelm him with words expressive of furious detestation and contempt.

"Devil," I exclaimed, "do you dare approach me? and do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust! and, oh! that I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!"

"I expected this reception," said the demon. "All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only

dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends."

"Abhorred monster! fiend that thou art! the tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil! you reproach me with your creation; come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed."

My rage was without bounds; I sprang on him, impelled by all the feelings which can arm one being against the existence of another.

He easily eluded me, and said—

"Be calm! I entreat you to hear me, before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine; my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous."

"Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall."

"How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favorable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? they spurn and hate me. The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge. These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow-beings. If the multitude of mankind knew of my existence, they would do as you do, and arm themselves for my destruction. Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness. Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver them from an evil which it only remains for you to make so great that not only you and your family, but thousands of others, shall be swallowed up in the whirlwinds of its rage. Let your compassion be moved, and do not disdain me. Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defense before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if

you will, destroy the work of your hands."

"Why do you call to my remembrance," I rejoined, "circumstances of which I shudder to reflect that I have been the miserable origin and author? Cursed be the day, abhorred devil, in which you first saw light! Cursed (although I curse myself) be the hands that formed you! You have made me wretched beyond expression. You have left me no power to consider whether I am just to you or not. Begone! relieve me from the sight of your detested form."

"Thus I relieve thee, my creator," he said, and placed his hated hands before my eyes, which I flung from me with violence; "thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor. Still thou canst listen to me, and grant me thy compassion. By the virtues that I once possessed, I demand this from you. Hear my tale; it is long and strange, and the temperature of this place is not fitting to your fine sensations; come to the hut upon the mountain. The sun is yet high in the heavens; before it descends to hide itself behind yon snowy precipices, and illuminate another world, you will have heard my story, and can decide. On you it rests whether I quit for ever the neighborhood of man, and lead a harmless life, or become the scourge of your fellow-creatures, and the author of your own speedy ruin."

As he said this, he led the way across the ice: I followed. My heart was full, and I did not answer him; but, as I proceeded, I weighed the various arguments that he had used, and determined at least to listen to his tale. I was partly urged by curiosity, and compassion confirmed my resolution. I had hitherto supposed him to be the murderer of my brother, and I eagerly sought a confirmation or denial of this opinion. For the first time, also, I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that I ought to render him happy before I complained of his wickedness. These motives urged me to comply with his demand.

We crossed the ice, therefore, and ascended the opposite rock. The air was cold, and the rain again began to descend: we entered the hut, the fiend with an air of exultation, I with a heavy heart and depressed spirits. But I consented to listen; and, seating myself by the fire which my odious companion had lighted, he thus began his tale.

CHAPTER 11

"It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt, at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. By degrees, I remembered, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves, so that I was obliged to shut my eyes. Darkness then came over me, and troubled me; but hardly had I felt this, when, by opening my eyes, as I now suppose, the light poured in upon me again. I walked, and, I believe, descended; but I presently found a great alteration in my sensations. Before, dark and opaque bodies had surrounded me, impervious to my touch or sight; but I now found that I could wander on at liberty, with no obstacles which I could not either surmount or avoid.

"The light became more and more oppressive to me; and, the heat wearying me as I walked, I sought a place where I could receive shade. This was the forest near Ingolstadt; and here I lay by the side of a brook resting from my fatigue, until I felt tormented by hunger and thirst. This roused me from my nearly dormant state, and I ate some berries which I found hanging on the trees, or lying on the ground. I slaked my thirst at the brook;

and then lying down, was overcome by sleep.

"It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half frightened, as it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate. Before I had quitted your apartment, on a sensation of cold, I had covered myself with some clothes; but these were insufficient to secure me from the dews of night. I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept.

"Soon a gentle light stole over the heavens, and gave me a sensation of pleasure. I started up, and beheld a radiant form rise from among the trees. I gazed with a kind of wonder. It moved slowly, but it enlightened my path; and I again went out in search of berries. I was still cold, when under one of the trees I found a huge cloak, with which I covered myself, and sat down upon the ground. No distinct ideas occupied my mind; all was confused. I felt light, and hunger, and thirst, and darkness; innumerable sounds rang in my ears, and on all sides various scents saluted me: the only object that I could distinguish was the bright moon, and I fixed my eyes on that with pleasure.

"Several changes of day and night passed, and the orb of night had greatly lessened, when I began to distinguish my sensations from each other. I gradually saw plainly the clear stream that supplied me with drink, and the trees that shaded me with their foliage. I was delighted when I first discovered that a pleasant sound, which often saluted my ears, proceeded from the throats of the little winged animals who had often intercepted the light from my eyes. I began also to observe, with greater accuracy, the forms that surrounded me, and to perceive the boundaries of the radiant roof of light which canopied me. Sometimes I tried to imitate the pleasant songs of the birds, but was unable. Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again.

"The moon had disappeared from the night, and again, with a lessened form, showed itself, while I still remained in the forest. My sensations had, by this time, become distinct, and my mind received every day additional ideas. My eyes became accustomed to the light, and to perceive objects in their right forms; I distinguished the insect from the herb, and, by degrees, one herb from another. I found that the sparrow uttered none but harsh notes, whilst those of the blackbird and thrush were sweet and enticing.

"One day, when I was oppressed by cold, I found a fire which had been left by some wandering beggars, and was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects! I examined the materials of the fire, and to my joy found it to be composed of wood. I quickly collected some branches; but they were wet, and would not burn. I was pained at this, and sat still watching the operation of the fire. The wet wood which I had placed near the heat dried, and itself became inflamed. I reflected on this; and, by touching the various branches, I discovered the cause, and busied myself in collecting a great quantity of wood, that I might dry it, and have a plentiful supply of fire. When night came on, and brought sleep with it, I was in the greatest fear lest my fire should be extinguished. I covered it carefully with dry wood and leaves, and placed wet branches upon it; and then, spreading my cloak, I lay on the ground, and sunk into sleep.

"It was morning when I awoke, and my first care was to visit the fire. I uncovered it, and a gentle breeze quickly fanned it into a flame. I observed this also, and contrived a fan of branches, which roused the embers when they were nearly extinguished. When night came again, I found, with pleasure, that the fire gave light as well as heat; and that the discovery of this element was useful to me in my food; for I found some of the offal that the travellers had left had been roasted, and tasted much more savory than the berries I gathered from the trees. I tried, therefore, to dress my food in the same manner, placing it on the live embers. I found that the berries were spoiled by this operation, and the nuts and roots much improved.

"Food, however, became scarce; and I often spent the whole day searching in vain for a few acorns to assuage the pangs of hunger. When I found this, I resolved to quit the place that I had hitherto inhabited, to seek for one where the few wants I experienced would be more easily satisfied. In this emigration, I exceedingly lamented the loss of the fire which I had obtained through accident, and knew not how to reproduce it. I gave several hours to the serious consideration of this difficulty; but I was obliged to relinquish all attempt to supply it; and, wrapping myself up in my cloak, I struck across the wood towards the setting sun.

"I passed three days in these rambles, and at length discovered the open country. A great fall of snow had taken place the night before, and the fields were of one uniform white; the appearance was disconsolate, and I found my feet chilled by the cold damp substance that covered the ground.

"It was about seven in the morning, and I longed to obtain food and shelter; at length I perceived a small hut, on a rising ground, which had doubtless been built for the convenience of some shepherd. This was a new sight to me; and I examined the structure with great curiosity. Finding the door open, I entered. An old man sat in it, near a fire, over which he was preparing his breakfast. He turned on hearing a noise; and, perceiving me, shrieked loudly, and, quitting the hut, ran across the fields with a speed of which his debilitated form hardly appeared capable. His appearance, different from any I had ever before seen, and his flight, somewhat surprized me. But I was enchanted by the appearance of the hut: here the snow and rain could not penetrate; the ground was dry; and it presented to me then as exquisite and divine a retreat as Pandemonium appeared to the demons of hell after their sufferings in the lake of fire. I greedily devoured the remnants of the shepherd's breakfast, which consisted of bread, cheese, milk, and wine; the latter, however, I did not like. Then, overcome by fatigue, I lay down among some straw, and fell asleep.

"It was noon when I awoke; and, allured by the warmth of the sun, which shone brightly on the white ground, I determined to recommence my travels; and, depositing the remains of the peasant's breakfast in a wallet I found, I proceeded across the fields for several hours, until at sunset I arrived at a village. How miraculous did this appear! the huts, the neater cottages, and stately houses, engaged my admiration by turns. The vegetables in the gardens, the milk and cheese that I saw placed at the windows of some of the cottages, allured my appetite. One of the best of these I entered; but I had hardly placed my foot within the door, before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted.

"The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open

country, and fearfully took refuge in a low hovel, quite bare, and making a wretched appearance after the palaces I had beheld in the village. This hovel, however, joined a cottage of a neat and pleasant appearance; but, after my late dearly bought experience, I dared not enter it. My place of refuge was constructed of wood, but so low that I could with difficulty sit upright in it. No wood, however, was placed on the earth, which formed the floor, but it was dry; and although the wind entered it by innumerable chinks, I found it an agreeable asylum from the snow and rain.

"Here then I retreated, and lay down happy to have found a shelter, however miserable, from the inclemency of the season, and still more from the barbarity of man.

"As soon as morning dawned, I crept from my kennel, that I might view the adjacent cottage, and discover if I could remain in the habitation I had found. It was situated against the back of the cottage, and surrounded on the sides which were exposed by a pig-sty and a clear pool of water. One part was open, and by that I had crept in; but now I covered every crevice by which I might be perceived with stones and wood, yet in such a manner that I might move them on occasion to pass out; all the light I enjoyed came through the sty, and that was sufficient for me.

"HAVING thus arranged my dwelling and carpeted it with clean straw, I retired; for I saw the figure of a man at a distance, and I remembered too well my treatment the night before to trust myself in his power. I had first, however, provided for my sustenance for that day, by a loaf of coarse bread, which I purloined, and a cup with which I could drink, more conveniently than from my hand, of the pure water which flowed by my retreat. The floor was a little raised, so that it was kept perfectly dry, and by its vicinity to the chimney of the cottage it was tolerably warm.

"Being thus provided, I resolved to reside in this hovel until something should occur which might alter my determination. It was indeed a paradise compared to the bleak forest, my former residence, the rain-dropping branches, and dank earth. I ate my breakfast with pleasure, and was about to remove a plank to procure myself a little water, when I heard a step, and looking through a small chink, I beheld a young creature, with a pail on her head, passing before my hovel. The girl was young, and of gentle demeanor, unlike what I have since found cottagers and farmhouse servants to be. Yet she was meanly dressed, a coarse blue petticoat and a linen jacket being her only garb; her fair hair was plaited, but not adorned: she looked patient, yet sad.

"I lost sight of her; and in about a quarter of an hour she returned, bearing the pail, which was now partly filled with milk. As she walked along, seemingly incommoded by the burden, a young man met her, whose countenance expressed a deeper despondence. Uttering a few sounds with an air of melancholy, he took the pail from her head, and bore it to the cottage himself. She followed, and they disappeared. Presently I saw the young man again, with some tools in his hand, cross the field behind the cottage; and the girl was also busied, sometimes in the house, and sometimes in the yard.

"On examining my dwelling, I found that one of the windows of the cottage had formerly occupied a part of it, but the panes had been filled up with wood. In one of these was a small and almost imperceptible chink, through which the eye could just penetrate. Through this crevice a small room was visible, white-washed and clean, but very bare of furni-

ture. In one corner, near a small fire, sat an old man, leaning his head on his hands in a disconsolate attitude. The young girl was occupied in arranging the cottage; but presently she took something out of a drawer, which employed her hands, and she sat down beside the old man, who, taking up an instrument, began to play, and to produce sounds sweeter than the voice of the thrush or the nightingale.

"It was a lovely sight, even to me, poor wretch! who had never beheld aught beautiful before. The silver hair and benevolent countenance of the aged cottager won my reverence, while the gentle manners of the girl enticed my love. He played a sweet mournful air, which I perceived drew tears from the eyes of his amiable companion, of which the old man took no notice, until she sobbed audibly; he then pronounced a few sounds, and the fair creature, leaving her work, knelt at his feet. He raised her, and smiled with such kindness and affection that I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food; and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions.

"Soon after this the young man returned, bearing on his shoulders a load of wood. The girl met him at the door, helped to relieve him of his burden, and, taking some of the fuel into the cottage, placed it on the fire; then she and the youth went apart into a nook of the cottage and he showed her a large loaf and a piece of cheese. She seemed pleased, and went into the garden for some roots and plants, which she placed in water, and then upon the fire. She afterwards continued her work, whilst the young man went into the garden, and appeared busily employed in digging and pulling up roots. After he had been employed thus about an hour, the young woman joined him, and they entered the cottage together.

"The old man had, in the meantime, been pensive; but, on the appearance of his companions, he assumed a more cheerful air, and they sat down to eat. The meal was quickly despatched. The young woman was again occupied in arranging the cottage; the old man walked before the cottage in the sun for a few minutes, leaning on the arm of the youth. Nothing could exceed in beauty the contrast between these two excellent creatures. One was old, with silver hairs and a countenance beaming with benevolence and love: the younger was slight and graceful in his figure, and his features were molded with the finest symmetry; yet his eyes and attitude expressed the utmost sadness and despondency. The old man returned to the cottage; and the youth, with tools different from those he had used in the morning, directed his steps across the fields.

"Night quickly shut in; but, to my extreme wonder, I found that the cottagers had a means of prolonging light by the use of tapers, and was delighted to find that the setting of the sun did not put an end to the pleasure I experienced in watching my human neighbors. In the evening, the young girl and her companion were employed in various occupations which I did not understand; and the old man again took up the instrument which produced the divine sounds that had enchanted me in the morning. So soon as he had finished, the youth began, not to play, but to utter sounds that were monotonous, and neither resembling the harmony of the old man's instrument nor the songs of the birds: I since found that he read aloud, but at that time I knew nothing of the science of words or letters.

"The family, after having been thus occupied for a short time, extinguished their lights, and retired to rest."

(To be continued next month)

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 6)

by an unknown writer they would be returned immediately. They often begin in a slow, dull manner, which would warn any editor that they were amateurish, and he would not read beyond the first page because he knows that his readers would not do so. Yet the readers are expected to wade through a lot of philosophy, weather reports, and what not before the real story begins. I began *Frankenstein* in the last quarter of the installment, and know more what it is about than if I had waded through all the unnecessary and bothersome introduction. Many of these reprints *are* good stories. But why don't you have them rehashed in modern form so they will be less dull reading? I like *The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis* and *The Brotherhood of Blood,* though the latter was far from being as weird as some you have published. I like vampire stories, because they make me think of things that *might* happen but don't. I especially like Seabury Quinn's work. The peppery little Frenchman, Jules de Grandin, is quite a likable characterization. I believe Quinn is your best author."

Carl J. Smith, of Port Felix, Nova Scotia, writes to the Eyrie: "As to your reprints, serials will take so long to get printed that we won't get as many short stories. We can get the serial reprints in the library or the bookstore, but where can we get the earlier stories that have appeared in W. T.? *The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis* in the May issue was a great story, but all of that author's stories are good. The little story by August W. Derleth was fine; although no one has mentioned his stories, they are all good, though short."

Writes Jack Williamson, of Elida, New Mexico: "The last issue of WEIRD TALES was fine, as usual—or rather, as is unusual in the flood of stereotyped fiction. *The Last Magician* I liked especially; it is an original conception convincingly done."

Writes Julius Nelson, of Indiana, Pennsylvania: "*The Last Magician,* written by Keller, my favorite author, seems to me to be the outstanding story in the May issue. For ingenuity of plot contrivance, it is a masterpiece. However, Lovecraft's story, *The Dunwich Horror,* which appeared in W. T. some time ago, is the best I have ever read."

"I have just finished reading Hugh B. Cave's *The Brotherhood of Blood,*" writes James N. Mooney, of Mount Kisco, New York. "What a story! Thrills, chills, and romance! I suggest that you continue to run serial reprints."

A letter from Mrs. Ravella Beatty, of Chicago, says: "My family and I have read your fine magazine every month for three years, and would not miss it for anything. I like your reprints very much. We read every installment of *The Wolf-Leader,* and it certainly was exciting. Your new reprint, *Frankenstein,* is surely odd and novel. Please print *Dracula,* as we have heard so much about it. Your vampire stories are superb."

Frank R. Moore, of Detroit, writes to the Eyrie: "Off and on, I have read WEIRD TALES for five or six years—which must mean something or other. First of all, I read the Eyrie, so I can agree or disagree with the likes and dislikes of others. My favorite authors are Seabury Quinn, Robert E. Howard, Edmond Hamilton—well, confound it, I like 'em all! WEIRD TALES is so popular in our home that I have to

hide it until I've read it. My favorite stories are tales of the grave, vampirism *(The Brotherhood of Blood* by Hugh B. Cave was excellent), reincarnation and such. I'm not so hot about interplanetary stories."

"Eight years of WEIRD TALES, with but one fault to find, that there is not enough weird poetry," writes A. E. Shaffer, of Verona, Pennsylvania. "Why not follow the reprinting of *Frankenstein* with two shorter reprints from the earlier WEIRD TALES, then give us *Dracula* followed by two more shorts, thus satisfying all except those who are against reprints, and I think they have dwindled down to comparatively few? It has been a long time since we have had a horror story with spiders as the chief theme. I'll never forget *Spider-Bite,* which appeared some time back."

"Not having written you for several years," writes Mrs. G. W. Fisher, of Vineland, New Jersey, "I must voice my indignation, as after reading the May Eyrie, I find not one word of praise for the best story in the May issue, Clark Ashton Smith's *The Planet of the Dead.* Don't your readers appreciate him? Although his *The Gorgon* in the April issue was fine and his *Vaults of Yoh-Vombis* in the current issue even better, being a real blood-chiller and actually (is this treason?) surpassing Lovecraft in horror, *The Planet of the Dead* seems to me to be one of his very best because of its remarkable vocabulary and beautifully colorful descriptions. I strongly object to your reprints of long novels, which we can read in any free library. I buy the magazine for something different. I endured through Dumas, and will suffer through *Frankenstein* again; but if you reprint *Dracula* I am through with you, as I know that book by heart."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of WEIRD TALES? The fourth installment of Seabury Quinn's serial, *The Devil's Bride,* and Clark Ashton Smith's tour de force, *The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis,* were the most popular stories in the May issue, as shown by your votes and letters.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JULY WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
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Coming Next Month

I TRIED to cry aloud, to warn de Grandin of the visitant's approach, but only a dull, croaking sound, scarce louder than a sigh, escaped my palsied lips.

Low as the utterance was, it seemed to carry to the creeping horror. With a wild, demoniac laugh it launched itself upon the bed where my friend lay sleeping, and in an instant I heard the sickening impact of a blow—another blow—and then a high, cracked voice crying: "Accursed of God, go now and tell your master who keeps watch and ward upon the earth!"

Weapon I had none, but at the bedside stood a table with a chromium carafe of chilled spring water, and this I hurled with all my might straight at the awful face.

A second marrow-freezing cry went up, and then a flash of blinding light—bright as a summer storm's forked lightning on a dark night—flared in my eyes, and I choked and gasped as strangling fumes of burning sulfur filled my mouth and nostrils.

"De Grandin, oh, de Grandin!" I wailed, leaping from the bed and blundering against furniture as I sought the light. Too well I knew that Jules de Grandin could not hear my voice; already I had seen the effects of such flailing blows as I had heard: the little Frenchman lay upon his bed, his head crushed in, his gallant spirit gone for ever from his slender, gallant body. . . .

Don't fail to read in next month's WEIRD TALES this powerful story of mysterious deaths, in which the victims are found with their skulls crushed in, and in every case the mark of a gigantic goat's hoof upon their brows. The story will be printed complete in the August issue:

THE DARK ANGEL

By SEABURY QUINN

—ALSO—

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A powerful weird novelette of devil-worship, and the attempt of Abdul Malaak and his ghastly crew to use a dazzlingly beautiful woman to control the destinies of a nation.

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Also, another thrilling installment of *Frankenstein,* and Victor Rousseau's exciting story, *The Phantom Hand.*

August WEIRD TALES Out July 1

The Man Who Never Came Back

(Continued from page 32)

He motioned and they followed him to a tall clump of bushes and at his direction huddled down behind them.

It seemed an hour that they lay uncomfortably hunched behind the bushes, fearful of reptiles when the grass behind them rustled; dreading the animal eyes that must stare at them from hidden places. Yet it was but a few moments actually, before there came to their straining ears the sound of a stealthy approach from the jungle across the clearing.

A baobab tree cast deep shadow on a strip of flattened, wiry grass and across this shadow there slowly moved into their vision a grotesquely inhuman group.

Men? Leopards? They were both—the terror-inspiring leopard-men of which the Bendjabis and the exiled M'Bano had told Herbie Tillson so many tales of horror. The creatures groveled, bellies to the grass. They went on all fours with a rippling leopard gait. They snarled among themselves. Subhuman, revolting, the lowest thing in the horror-ridden country of the jungle.

The three men in the shadows felt a dizzy nausea as they watched breathlessly. As the pack milled about, beating the long grass still flatter to the ground, there came a sudden, throaty snarl and into the clearing glided a huge leopard, flat head thrust forward, eyes gleaming, fangs showing. His powerful tail lashed slowly back and forth as he surveyed the groveling leopard-men who lay whimpering, bellies to the ground.

The leopard lifted its tawny head and gave out the eery, blood-thirsty cry of the hunting-leopard. The leopard-men, in their hideous obsession, threw back their heads to answer, but on the cry of the king-leopard there came a resounding shot from behind the very bushes where Bannister and his men lay hidden.

Three things happened then, at the same time. The leopard-men ran screaming shrilly from the clearing, leaping and tearing at one another in their haste, as they disappeared into the jungle. The king-leopard leaped high into the air, spun about twitching and lashing his tail, then fell heavily to the ground, where he lay sprawled and still. At the same time, directly behind Bannister, there sprang a lithe, black figure, brandishing a rifle.

It was Molu. He bent over the dead leopard and pointed to a crimson hole behind the left ear.

"Him gone now. No more catch wife of Bendjabi." His voice was triumphant; his white teeth shone in a smile of satisfied revenge.

Bannister spoke to him sternly. "You followed us, Molu, to kill the leopard?"

"Oh, yes. I kill him," repeated Molu, only half understanding in his excitement. He peered at Bannister sidewise in a cunning, intent way. "Him no leopard for sure; *him man;* him lead leopard-men."

"My God! What is he saying?" exclaimed Vierling.

"You heard him," said Bannister, quietly. "Let me talk with him."

To Molu he said, "You're talking crazy, Molu. Your talk—no good. You don't know."

"Yes, I know," was Molu's stubborn reply. "I show you." He bent and lifted the left foot of the leopard and with a black finger he counted the toes of the animal. "One-two-three-four-five-six." Molu had been taught to count soon after he had come to the bungalow

to work, and he was very proud of the accomplishment. He counted the leopard's toes again.

Dropping the heavy foot, he said, as though closing the incident: "You see. Him white man—from Pambia—white man with six toes, too. Molu give him breakfast one time and he wear no shoes. I *know*."

The childish mind of the black man had brought horror to the three who listened to his explanation. It *was* childish, they tried to reason. It *was* an impossible and hideous thing Molu was telling them.

"My God, let's go—let's get away from this place," cried O'Donnel, with a long, shuddering breath. He crossed himself, muttering a prayer.

"Yes," said Vierling. "Let's get out of this cursed forest."

"Leopard-men come, take him away all right," said Molu with cheerful nonchalance, indicating the sprawled beast.

Bannister could not find words that he could speak. His thoughts were formless ones; chaotic; vague. He felt, too, a growing desire to hurry back to Pambia and see—he scarcely admitted to himself what he expected to see.

So with Molu trotting along beside them, they went back in a silence that was heavy with dread thoughts. They hurried, stumbling, breathing hard through the odorous jungle, fighting swarms of insects.

And they came to Pambia across the river at an hour when the mad moon's brilliance was at its height, the sands, the sea, the buildings of the West Coast Products Company all white and shining in its unreal light.

They bade Molu to keep silence and they all went into the hall of the bungalow and stood at Herbie Tillson's door.

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BANNISTER was the one who quietly opened the door and looked into the little room. He put a hand to his eyes, then, in a dizzy way, as he spoke.

"It is as Molu said and—Herbie has come back."

Very quietly with throats that contracted painfully and with eyes that were filled with pity, they came and stood beside the bed. Herbie Tillson lay there, very white and very still. He was dead; they saw that at once—a crimson hole neatly drilled behind the left ear. He did not look at peace, for in the widely open eyes was something so unspeakably horrible that they could not look upon his face.

Molu, alone, was not moved to pity. Molu looked at the body of Herbie Tillson with hard, brilliant, black eyes.

"No, him no come back," he stated, baldly.

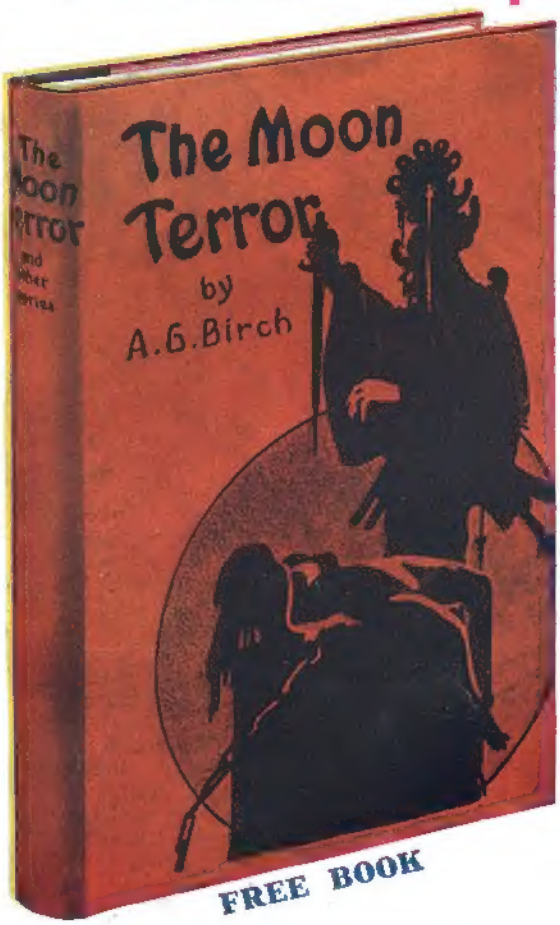
The three men turned to him frowningly. Molu enjoyed the attention. "No," he explained, complacently. "Him no come back. White man think so, but black man know different." He pointed dramatically to the bare feet of Herbie Tillson, feet wet and stained with jungle earth, and shudderingly Bannister saw the foot with the six toes.

Molu went on in his soft voice, "Bendjabi know. Him in the great Swabi for always. *He never come back.*"

THE *Astoria* came to Pambia. She took on the bales and barrels and boxes of the West Coast Products Company and left more bales and barrels and boxes when she sailed. And when the *Astoria* sailed, she took Herbie Tillson back to England, just as Bannister had said she would. For in the captain's vault was a small urn, chaste in shape and color, and containing all that remained of the man who never came back.

W. T.—9

A Weird Whisper from the Ether



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